Pinnacle Papers
VOLUME I

الإِنْسَانُ وَعَدَالَةُ اللهِ فِي الأَرْضِ

Man and Allah's Justice on Earth

By
Imam Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī

Translated by
Mahdi Lock

NAWA BOOKS

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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We at Nawabooks would like to express our appreciation to everybody who contributed in making this book a reality. We pray that Allah ﷻ bestow His blessings upon it by guiding readers of this book closer towards Allah ﷻ and His beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Pinnacle Papers: A Collection of Masterpieces by Imam Muhammad Sa'id Ramadān al-Būtī

الإِنْسَانُ وَعَدَالَةُ اللهِ فِي الْأَرْضِ - Man and Allah's Justice on Earth

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Imam Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍan Al-Būṭī is one of the foremost Muslim theologians and legal scholars of this age. Born in 1929 in the village of Ayn Dewar in northern Syria, the imam moved to Damascus at the age of four with his father, the great scholar Mullā Ramaḍān al-Būṭī ﷺ, where he received his primary and secondary education. In 1953, he joined the Faculty of Sharī'ah at the University of al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt, graduating with a first class in 1955. The following year he obtained a Diploma in Education from the Faculty of Arabic Language at the same University.

In 1958, the Imam was appointed as a teacher at the secondary school in Homs and in 1961, he was appointed as a lecturer in the Faculty of Sharī'ah at the University of Damascus. In 1965, at the University of al-Azhar once again, he obtained his doctorate with high distinction and a recommendation for a teaching post. That same year, he was appointed as a teacher in the Faculty of Sharī'ah at the University of Damascus, then an assistant professor and finally a full professor. He became the vice dean of that college in 1975 and then the dean in 1977. A few years later, he was appointed head of the department of Theology and Comparative Religion.

In addition to his lecturing, Imam al-Būṭī wrote around sixty books covering various Islamic sciences and subjects, the most prominent ones being Fiqh al-Sīrah (The Jurisprudence of the Prophetic Biography), Kubrā al-Yaqīniyyāt al-Kawniyyah (The Greatest Universal Sureties) and his four-volume commentary on the spiritual aphorisms of Imam Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh al-Askandarī. He was also very active in teaching common believers in local masjids, especially Masjid al-Īmān in Damascus, and on television, recordings of which can be found online and especially on the site www.naseemalsham.com. He also served as the imam at the Umayyad Grand Masjid in Damascus for Friday prayers, a post he held for decades.

On March 21, 2013, Imam al-Būtī, along with approximately fifty students, was murdered by terrorists while teaching Qur'ānic commentary in Masjid al-Īmān. Despite the immense trials and tribulations that Syria was and is still enduring, Imam al-Būṭī ﷺ was never dissuaded from his dedicated service to knowledge. After a funeral prayer that was attended by thousands of people, the Imam was buried next to Imam Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī ﷺ in Bāb al-Saghīr graveyard in Damascus. May the Lord ﷻ bless and have mercy on him and all of us.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praise belongs to Allah, Lord of all creation, who forgives sins and with Him alone is every success. There is no power or strength except in Him. As Allah has honoured this miserable slave with the completion of such a task, all I ask is that He increase the blessings He has already bestowed upon me and to make me a better believer, cleanse my heart and grant me further strength to serve Him and the Ummah of His Beloved ﷺ.

As for the creation, I must begin by thanking Dr Maḥmūd Ramaḍān for bringing this book to my attention. I was looking for something on the victim mentality, as it appears to be something that many Muslims suffer from, and Dr Maḥmūd suggested this book by his grandfather ﷺ and this book has not disappointed in the least. He then answered each and every one of my questions and I thank his father, Dr Tawfīq Ramaḍān, for writing the foreword. May Allah reward them and increase them in this life and the next and may He grant relief and succour to all the people of Shām, āmīn!

Regarding editing and proofreading, I must thank my old friend and the main person Allah used to bring me to Islam, Hazem Mahdy, who speaks both Arabic and English like a native speaker. He read

through both the Arabic text and the translation and made sure that everything was not only correct but readable. May Allah reward him again and again in this life and in the Hereafter, āmīn!

Regarding a few translation questions, I have to thank my teacher, al-Ḥājj Abū Ja'far al-Ḥanbalī, who graciously took the time to explain how certain Arabic terms and expressions would best be conveyed in English, as he does with almost all of my translated works. May Allah reward him immensely in this life and the next, āmīn!

I also need to thank Brother Iskander Gani for proofreading the text one last time before it was sent to the printers. May Allah reward him and his family abundantly in both abodes, āmīn!

Furthermore, after a change in plan, I must thank Ustādh Jalaluddeen of Nawa Books for taking on this project. May Allah bless him in this life, in all of his righteous endeavours, as well as in the next, āmīn!

Lastly, I thank my wife for her patience, serenity and encouragement throughout the translation process. May Allah reward her and her parents immensely, āmīn!

Nevertheless, despite the assistance and efforts of the aforementioned, I must stress that any errors or shortcomings that still remain are solely my responsibility. We praise Allah ﷻ for any benefit that comes out of this work. Only the mistakes are mine.

If Allah so wills, this work will bring peace and tranquillity to the hearts of many believers along with guidance and understanding for many more.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATOR

Mahdi Lock is a professional freelance translator of classical Arabic Islamic texts into English. He has a BA in Arabic and History from the University of Leeds, an MA in Arabic Linguistics from King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, and a Diploma in Translation from the Chartered Institute of Linguists in London, of which he is also a Member (MCIL). He has been studying theology, law and other Islamic sciences for several years with teachers in England, North Africa and the Middle East. To date, his translated works include Kitāb al-Ḥalāl wa al-Ḥarām by Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, Kitāb al-Waqf from al-Mughnī al-Muḥtāj by al-Khaṭīb al-Shirbīnī, the introduction to al-Majmū' by Imam Yaḥyā al-Nawawī and Sharḥ al-Ṣudūr by Imam Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī.

FOREWORD - ARABIC

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الحمد لله رب العالمين، والصلاة والسلام على سيدنا محمد وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين ومن تبعهم بإحسان إلى يوم الدين، وبعد

فقد ازدادت تساؤلات الشباب في هذه المرحلة الخطيرة من حياة الأمة حول عدالة الله. وتردد سؤالهم على الأسماع [أين عدالة الله]، بسبب حالة الإحباط التي أصابت الكثيرين منهم، وبسبب الأزمات التي أحاطت بهم، أضف إلى ذلك الصورة المشوهة للدين التي قدمت إليهم في غمار الأحداث التي تجري هنا وهناك.

وكان العلامة الإمام محمد سعيد رمضان البوطي قد طرحت عليه في فترة مضت أسئلة تدور حول [أين عدالة الله] صدرت إما بسبب تشويش يثيره الملاحدة لجعلها سبباً في شك يفضي إلى الإلحاد، أو بسبب صدمات تعرض لها المرء في هذه المرحلة الخطيرة من تاريخ الأمة، والتي جعلت الكثيرين يثيرون هذا التساؤل بسبب ألم يعتصر قلوبهم لمصائب تقع هنا وهناك من حولهم. وفي هذا الكتاب الصغير في حجمه والخطير في موضوعه عالج المؤلف رحمه الله تعالى هذه المشكلة التي تعتلج في نفوس كثيرين بأسلوب واضح ومقنع. وأجاب على التساؤلات المثارة حول موضوعه. في صفحات قليلة في عددها مثمرة في عرضها وأسلوبها.

ولعل هذا الكتاب في موضوعه يعالج لدى المسلم بصورة خاصة حالة نفسية بسبب أحداث تجري من حوله، تنعكس لديه بآثار سلبية قد تنال من عقيدته. أما المسلم في المجتمع الغربي فهو بحاجة إلى أن يدرك طريقة التعامل مع الآلام والمصائب التي تقع به أو من حوله، وكيف يربطها بالحقيقة الإيمانية التي تستقر في عقله وقلبه.

وقد وجد الأستاذ المترجم من الضرورة بمكان أن يترجم هذا الكتاب إلى اللغة الإنكليزية، لمعالجة المشكلة نفسها بصورتها في العالم الغربي الذي قد يكون أحوج إلى معالجتها. والموضوع دقيق لمساسه بالعقيدة من جهة وصلته بحياة المسلم بصورة مباشرة من جهة أخرى.

وأن يتولى ترجمة مثل هذا البحث أستاذ كالأستاذ مهدي لوك الذي تذوق اللغة العربية وأتقنها، فينقل هذا الكتاب من خلال الترجمة الدقيقة إلى لغته الأم (اللغة الانكليزية)، فهذا أمر يبعث على الطمأنينة والسعادة، فلعله الأقدر على إعطاء الموضوع حقه كما عهدناه، جزاه الله خيراً.

كما أشكر دار الفكر ومكتبة: Nawa Books على حرصها وحسن قيامها بنشر المعرفة الصحيحة، بما يسعف شبابنا وطلبة العلم ويضيء أمامهم طريق الرشد والسداد.

دمشق، ٥ ذو القعدة ١٤٤٢هـ

محمد توفيق رمضان البوطي

FOREWORD

In the Name of Allah, the All Merciful, the Most Merciful

All praise is due to Allah, and blessing and peace be upon our master Muḥammad, all his family and Companions, and those who follow them in excellence until the Day of Repayment.

To proceed:

The youth in this critical stage of the Ummah's life continue to ask more and more questions about Allah's justice. They keep asking, 'Where is Allah's justice?' because of the state of frustration that has afflicted so many of them and because of the crises that have surrounded them, in addition to the distorted image of the religion that has been presented to them through the inundation of events here and there.

Over a certain period of time, the great scholar, Imam Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī ﷺ, was asked questions on the topic of "Where is Allah's Justice?" These questions were the result of either confusion spread by secularists in order to cause doubt that leads to secularism or due to certain shocks and traumas that people are experiencing in this critical stage of the Ummah's history. These shocks and traumas, caused by the various afflictions here and there, has made many of them bring up this question, due to the deep pain they are feeling in their hearts. In this book, which is small in size and significant in content, the author ﷺ treats this problem that has troubled many souls in a clear,

convincing fashion. He has answered the provocative questions on the topic on pages that are few in number yet fruitful in their exposition and manner.

Perhaps this book, in its subject matter, is treating what is, for the Muslim in particular, a psychological state caused by events occurring all around him, which are reflected in negative effects that can get to his beliefs. As for the Muslim in the West, he needs to understand how to deal with whatever pain and adversity happens to him or those around him, and how to connect them to the reality of faith that is firmly settled in his mind and heart.

The Ustādh, the translator, saw it was necessary to translate this book into English, in order to treat this same problem as it is manifested in the West, and in which the need to treat it could be even greater. It is a delicate topic because it encroaches upon theology on the one hand and is directly connected to a Muslim's daily life on the other.

To have a translation like this undertaken by a teacher like Ustādh Mahdi Lock, who has tasted the Arabic language and become proficient in it and thus brought this book, by way of an accurate translation, into his mother tongue (English), is something that invokes serenity and joy. Perhaps he is the most capable of giving the topic its rights exactly as we entrusted it to him. May Allah reward him.

Likewise, I thank Dār al-Fikr and Nawa Books for their enthusiasm and excellence in spreading authentic knowledge, which helps our youth and students of knowledge and lights the way of guidance for them.

5 Zulkaedah 1442H

Dr. Muḥammad Tawfīq Ramaḍān al-Būṭī

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION

I did not imagine how important the subject matter that I discussed in this treatise would be before the first edition was published, despite the many questions that I received regarding it.

Rather, I learned afterwards that this subject persists as a mental puzzle in the minds of many educated people and intellectuals, regardless of their varying theologies and schools. Therefore, it has been employed as a brilliant snare by those who carry out their intellectual attack in order to remove the upcoming Muslim generation from having a clear and sound view of the reality of this religion and its essence.

I learned this from the groups that devoted themselves to studying this book, and most of them are groups that have no prior experience of studying Islamic researches, and have never devoted themselves to such with any passion or inquisitiveness.

Some of them have suggested that I expand on some of the points in this research, and that I provide more detail regarding some of the general matters. However, I have thought about it and I have decided that any addition therein would render it no longer harmonious with this series of researches, which I have wanted to be as easily accessible as possible, using the most concise expressions in the simplest of ways. This means that it should be feasible for any student, whatever their

level may be and regardless of their preoccupations and circumstances, to benefit from the researches in this series and not find any difficulty in understanding them.

Moreover, I insist that these researches – regardless of the success that accompanies me in treating them – are at the top of the list of what this generation needs in terms of knowledge and perception.

In addition, I do not claim that this light, expeditious style completely covers the importance of these researches, or satisfies every curiosity regarding them.

However, I believe it is a door that a freethinker can enter and then come out believing in them and paying attention to their value, such that if he has any remaining questions or wishes to have certain aspects clarified, he has the strong desire to do further research. He will sense the importance of this research and this push to expand his horizons, which will in turn clarify every hidden matter and lift every confusion.

Most people in this age have become afflicted with rapid, journalistic reading, which is a foul and dangerous education that most of this generation have received in the school of newspapers and magazines.

This is the case such that when a young person wants to learn something about the most important, logical, philosophical or scientific principles, he approaches them in the same way he approaches newspapers and magazines. If not, he stays where he is and does it without reading and researching.

I believe that the most sacred task of the conscious writer – in this stage of our lives – is to choose from this light, journalist style a method that is characterised by equanimity and accuracy. Then he should use it to elevate the reader to a complete level of knowledge using all the tools of inspiration and elevation available to him.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

All praise is due to Allah, praise that complies with His blessings and compensates His abundance. Glory be to you, O Allah. I cannot sufficiently enumerate praises upon You; You are as You have praised Yourself.

Blessings and peace be upon the Seal of the Prophets and Messengers, our master Muḥammad ﷺ, and all of his Family and Companions.

To proceed:

Some time ago, I received the following question:

'Allah is just and merciful, so why are there so many people in society who suffer, without having committed any sin or crime, trials and tribulations that break a human being's heart, while at the same time there are people who enjoy all kinds of blessings without possessing any merit that would necessitate such?

'Where does justice lie between these two groups of people?'

I have received this question so many times, in classrooms and lecture theatres as well as in various other gatherings and occasions, that I have lost count.

I think there are those who are concerned with planting this question in people's minds, and then there are those who are concerned with replanting it therein every time it has ripened, mellowed and received a clear, useful answer.

It is as if those who advocate planting it with this astonishing care imagine that it is the puzzle of all puzzles. They think it is guaranteed to corrupt the conviction that the believers have in their Lord ﷻ and that it will be like a time bomb in the minds of those who reflect and research. When it explodes, it will destroy all the various Islamic principles and facts that have been stored therein.

When I became aware of this, I felt that verbal answers to questions like this would not suffice. Rather, they must be recorded comprehensively and in detail in a book and made available to everyone – those who have this question hovering around them and those who try – by whatever means – to slip it into their minds and thoughts.

I wrote an article in the Kuwaiti magazine *al-Waʿī al-Islāmī*[1] in which I gave a brief answer to this question. I did not think that it sufficiently fleshed out the topic from all sides, so I used what was in that article as a seed for a comprehensive research, which is included in this treatise.

I am presenting this to two groups of people:

The first group is the general public, those who have faith in Allah, His Messenger and the Last Day but do not have sufficient Islamic

1 (tn): i.e. "Islamic Awareness"

knowledge to protect their faith from the specious arguments and difficult questions that the emissaries of the intellectual use to attack and throw at them. Thus, they do not stop looking – with ardent passion and sincerity – for quick, sufficient knowledge that will remove these arguments and questions and put an end to them.

The second group is a minority of people whose thoughts have been infiltrated with denial[2] of Allah's religion, under the pressure of special, exceptional circumstances that each one of them has had to endure. They are limited to one of the following:

Whisperings that one of the heretical deviants has stuck in his mind, in a wretched way, by which he has provoked one corner of his mind towards vehement ideological revolution while leaving the rest to plunge into a deep sleep. His mind is thus left to reflect on the world the way a one-eyed person views it. He sees things in other than their actual place. He imagines them to be more than they actually are and he sees among them apparitions of delusion that have no reality.

Or, there are psychological issues that have become consolidated within him and have gotten out of control, and this is because of false religious expressions in either his thinking or his behaviour. He sees them and is thus misled by them, and then because of them, his soul feels disgusted by the entire religion. Then this disgust in his soul makes his mind receptive to heresy and secularism.

Or it is the shock of some tribulation that afflicted him and he was not able to bear it, or some worldly benefit grabbed his attention from

2 Ar. *ilḥad*, which could also be translated as secularism, atheism, heresy

afar and he imagined that the only way to get to it would be by crossing the bridge of heresy and immorality. Halfway across the bridge, he found himself confined; he has not crossed it and reached the goal that he was seeking and he has not gone back to the beginning where he originally was.

By all means, I am presenting this treatise to both groups, and maybe I am hoping that the second group will receive it better than the first. I know that there are obstacles between them and books like these, obstacles that have thickened over time and various events. Thus, nothing remains in their souls that would inspire them to look for these books, approach them or read them thoroughly.

However, I ask Allah the Exalted to destine a way for this treatise of mine to reach them, and to grant them the patience to read it such that they reflect on it and contemplate it with deliberation.

Maybe many of them will become aware of the reality of the matter, and maybe they will cling to it after avoiding and ignoring it for a long time. Maybe their hearts will seek to be illuminated by the guidance of faith in Allah ﷻ before their lives reach their inevitable end.

It suffices me that the noble reader be free when he is reading, that he not make his new education and reading a mere nourishment or shield for his old ideas. Rather, he should take what he has read and add to it, so that his mind can be expanded for further inquiry and research, without any bigotry or bias. Then, he must keep researching, and not satisfy himself with having comprehended half of the truth or arriving at only a part of it. Indeed, comprehending only part of the truth is more harmful than being ignorant of it.

Nothing harms Islamic thought today as much as a fragmented, distorted education of Islam. People find it in quick, journalistic discussions that newspapers and magazines are overflowing with. Then they become convinced of them without following them up with any verification or fuller study. After that, in the imaginations of many people, it becomes that inverted education that is detached from the matters of Islam that are self-evident.

As for the third group, they have taken to denying Allah and rejecting His religion as a hobby of theirs, seeking therein to bring joy to their hearts and tranquillity to their souls. They dedicate all their time and attention to preaching this – and therefore we have nothing to do with these people. Discussions like this will never satisfy them, no matter how scientific or logical they are. They are like those whom Allah has described by saying,

﴿وَلَوْ فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَابًا مِّنَ ٱلسَّمَآءِ فَظَلُّوا۟ فِيهِ يَعْرُجُونَ،
لَقَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّمَا سُكِّرَتْ أَبْصَـٰرُنَا بَلْ نَحْنُ قَوْمٌ مَّسْحُورُونَ﴾

"Even if We opened up to them a door to heaven, and they spent the day ascending through it, they would only say, 'Our eyesight is befuddled! Or rather we have been put under a spell!" [al-Ḥijr 15:14-15]

However, we ask Allah the Exalted to guide them and us to the truth...to protect us from misguidance...and to grant us the blessing of free thought, free of dependency and bigotry, which, by their nature, shackle one's thoughts and intellect.

And with Allah is every success.

Damascus, 10th of Dhul Qa'dah, 1391 AH

Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī

IS THE QUESTIONER A BELIEVER IN ALLAH?

This type of question usually flows off the tongues of those who do not believe in Allah and do not affirm His existence. The hatred of the religion and its foundations that resides within them makes them despise the characteristics of the believers, and they plan means and ways of spreading doubts about Allah and His existence amongst them. Thus, they fabricate problems in order to provoke these doubts and they prevent their intellects from knowing the truth by veiling them.

For these people, rejecting the religion is a personal joy that delights their souls, before they present it to their own minds. When that pleased them, they relied on its tasty fruits in their lives and in their behaviour, and started making their intellectual capacities subservient to their egoistic desires. On top of their rejection, they started building intellectual and doctrinal rules that branch out from none other than that same rejection.

They laid down the hypothesis based on their desires and then branched out from it and made rational exigencies. Then they started discussing them with people while they themselves were unconvinced before believing in them blindly and firmly.

These people are like someone who wants to refute the competence of some researcher in a particular science, so, based on that, he proceeds to discredit his ideas. Then he uses his own discrediting as proof of that researcher's ignorance and lack of expertise and competence that he was alleging.

If he woke up to the reality of the matter, he would know that he was caught up in the middle of his own fantasies. Were it not for him imagining that the researcher was ignorant, he would never have thought that his works were riddled with mistakes and foolishness. Were it not for this imagination, he would never have found any evidence for the veracity of his initial illusion.

In other words, they have not – from the outset – gone to any length to have sincere certainty in Allah the Exalted's existence. If they had done so, they would have become certain that He is the Most Just of Judges, for the Lord cannot be other than that.

If they were certain of that, they would believe in the messages of the Prophets and what they contain by way of defining the truth about this worldly life, its beginning, its end and its connection to the life that follows.

If they believed in that, they would grasp the secret behind man's existence in the universe, and they would become aware of the trust

that Allah has made him bear in this phase of life. They would also realise that there are no aspects of life that stir up ambiguity in one's soul, or push a researcher towards doubt or rejection. They would find everything therein to be in perfect harmony with the nature of this trust, and that it constitutes the most accurate and most appropriate preparation for the eternal life to come.

Yes, all these realisations of certainty only grow out of another immense certainty that precedes it, which is faith in Allah ﷻ. Nothing else will cause one to arrive at the mystery of this universe, while pondering on anything else will not free one from a whirlpool of contemplation that is of no benefit.

These people, who pretend not to see the clear reality in front of them, are going round and round the middle of a hollow ring that has no end. They have become pleased to do that to themselves, hoping that their intellectual vortex will be reflected on other people around them. Perhaps they will fall into the traps of their delusions, and then not find any way to escape or get out.

No research or discussion should be directed at people like this.

If there were a way to say something to them, it would be no more than the following:

Stop looking into this branch issue. If all the people on earth gathered around you in an effort to give you an answer, there is nothing they could say to convince you and make you accept what they are saying.

Go back and look at the real, initial problem, the problem of indifference towards faith in the Creator ﷻ.

Ask about and explore this fundamental fact first, without deviating from it and delving into these kinds of delusions, which only stem from your ignorance and avoidance of this fact.

However, around these people, there are other groups that have not disbelieved like their disbelief, and they have not called to heresy and secularism as a profession. Maybe they still have a considerable amount of faith in Allah and His Oneness, but they have not dedicated themselves to having enough knowledge to satiate their intellectual curiosities in the field of Islamic theology and its foundations. Thus, they are shaken by the questions that are posed by the professionals of the ideological attack, and they fall into confusion and misgivings from which there is no way out.

Therefore, they must be answered in a simple fashion and at length, not to silence the professional heretics and secularists but to give understanding to those who sincerely seek to understand. I have found no act of worship, drawing one nearer to Allah ﷻ that is better and greater than you finding someone who has been thwarted from the path by these plotters and you approach him kindly and patiently in an effort to place him at the start of the correct path.

May Allah send blessing and peace upon the one who said, {That Allah guides one man through you is better for you than whatever the sun rises over.}[3]

3 Agreed upon

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF TRIBULATION?

We start by asking: what is the meaning of tribulation? [4]

How can you say that tribulation is only embodied in the person whose limb has been amputated, or the one who has gone blind or his body has been taken over by some disease?

In fact, who told you that tribulation is that which is apparent on the human body and is clearly materialised on some part of it?

Tribulation is actually that which penetrates the innermost parts of the soul, and thus the heart is afflicted by its bitterness and agony.

Tribulation, therefore, is not what your eyes see from people's outward appearance. Rather, it is what encompasses their souls and becomes consolidated in their hearts and in their feelings, which your eyes do not see and what your perceptive faculties do not discern. The way tribulation gets to people is more general and comprehensive than what you might think. There is not a single person who does not fall into it and taste its torment.

4 Ar. *miḥnah*

The foundation of the mistake in this matter is your seeing someone walking outside who is deaf or blind and it moves your heart. You feel sympathy for him and his situation, and you are absolutely certain that his soul has been crushed out of pain and that his heart is wasting away with grief and sorrow. You see someone else who goes about the earth in a magnificent car, the halo of bliss and wealth shining around his face, and you are absolutely certain that his soul is jumping with joy and that his heart is overflowing with bliss and delight.

You have this certainty about both of them, but you have not looked into either of their hearts. If you did, you would know that the scale that you are relying upon does not give as steady an indication as you think. You would know that the causes of happiness and misery are not confined to that which is apparent, and it is one of the biggest mistakes to connect the state of someone's heart to that which is apparent.

Someone who gets lost while driving and ends up in some trackless wilderness, not knowing where to go in order to get home safely, suffers from a suffocating tribulation, even if he is surrounded by verdant meadows and aromatic pasture.

Someone who would get excited at the sight of a piaster, because anything that causes his wealth to grow overwhelms him with joy, might suffer some unexpected financial loss while partaking in trade. He will feel like his soul has been crushed by this severe, indescribable tribulation, even though you see him living a pleasant, easy life in a beautiful, safe house.

Then there is the person whose heart is attached to some beautiful woman in this world and he imagines that he will enjoy all kinds of

abundant blessings if he can just be with her. He weaves together hopes and dreams, tells the world about them and how he hopes to attain them. Then the world places thick barriers between him and her, between him and all his hopes. This person finds himself wrapped in the voracity of a tribulation that is like shrouds of flames, no joy or pleasure in this world can put them out, but you might look at him and only see that which makes you deem him fortunate or feel envious towards him.

Then there is the person who has been led by misery to a life of amusement and absolute libertinism, and thus he stays up all night addicted to pleasure and squeezing out as much of it as he can. Then he sleeps deeply throughout the day, and this continues to be his habit and lifestyle. You might think that he is happy, walking around at night with a proud gait, wearing formal dress under the bright or faint lights. If you knew his inward state, and arrived at the innermost part of his soul, you would see behind his heart a cauldron overflowing with anxiety. You would see that his sleep is nothing more than a nightmare of grief and worry, covering both the outward and the inward of his feelings and intellect. At the same time, everyone else thinks that he is in some oasis of comfort and ease, something they can only enjoy if they work hard and exert themselves.

Then there is the person who is cut off from having faith in Allah the Exalted and thus his mind is constantly preoccupied with various questions about the universe, man, the secret of his existence and how he will end up, without ever finding a satisfactory answer. He feels pain and dismay in his soul because of the turmoil, chaos, conflict, hostility and injustice that he sees around him, such that he starts to imagine that any manifestation of luxury and comfort is like a scary flash of lightning on a dark, stormy night. It is more foreboding than

encouraging, or it lights up the path without one being guided to any secret behind all of this or explanation. You might look at this person and think that he is happy when he is actually living in absolute fear for himself. If you used discernment, you would find that tribulation penetrates his soul and reaches the very roots of his thoughts and intellect, eventually throwing him into either a field of madness or on the way to committing suicide.[5]

On the other hand, there are many people whom Allah has deprived of the gift of sight, but their souls are happy and content and knows no anxiety.

You can look at many people and see the harshest manifestations of misery and poverty, yet their hearts remain throbbing with amazing mirth and joy that you can only conceive of in the memories of your childhood.

You see many people with diseases and ailments ravaging their bodies living in the middle of a combination of feelings of pain and deep contentment in their hearts, contentment with their lives and what Allah the Exalted has willed for them therein.

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5 Youth often visit me and complain about the intellectual confusion in their lives. Many of them have told me about the painful reality that they live in and it could be worse than the outward tribulations and tragedies that other people suffer from. These youth live lives that people would normally regards as lives of luxury and comfort.

One of the most significant manifestations of this misery is that people complain to you without being able to put a finger on what the cause is, and this increases their discontent and constriction.

Another significant manifestation of this is the increase of what is called psychiatrists (*al-aṭibbā' an-nafsaniyyīn*) everywhere, along with more and more publications and books connected to this topic, which the masses turn to in times of adversity without finding benefit in any of them.

However, I do not mean to say that the tribulations that are visible on the body are illusory afflictions that have no effect on the soul. Rather, I want to draw the reader's attention to the fact that what is considered here is what the soul feels and what state the heart might be in. I also want to make it clear that the afflictions that have an effect on someone's feelings are not confined to that which is visible and apparent on some people, and thus you feel sympathy for them and feel pain for the situation they are in. Rather, they are different and varied, and you rarely see someone who is not afflicted by some type of tribulation.

In brief, we say that the hardship that befalls someone is not the result of the affliction itself, whatever it may be. Rather, it is a result of the soul's being unable to accommodate it and rise above it.

Therefore, in answering this question, the first thing you need to know is that it is based on a serious mistake in its formulation and composition. The correct way to formulate it would be as follows:

"Why do peoples' hearts differ as to whether they feel dejected or happy when the outward purport of divine mercy and justice requires that they be equal in their feelings of happiness and joy?"

THERE ARE ONLY TWO WAYS

If you contemplated, you would know that there are only two ways for a man's heart to attain contentment and happiness.

The first way would be for man to possess a supernatural ability that would allow him to keep his inner dialogue of thoughts, his intellect that constantly disrupts him and his negative thoughts away from his soul.

Most agonies that afflict man's heart and bring anxiety to his soul are the result of prolonged thinking, chasing his imagination and letting his mind run with questions. He remembers the past and feels pain because of the good that he thinks he missed out on. He imagines the future and feels pain when he thinks about the disruptions and causes of pain that might happen. Therefore, the moments of the present that his life passes through are transformed into grief over the past and fears for the future.

If it were possible for him to resort to forgetfulness and hope, or to indifference and avoidance, his heart would be rid of these afflictions and thus not feel them, and he would not be distressed when bad things happen.

However, the Wise Bringer Into Being ﷻ did not will to give man, this noble and distinguished creation, this ability. Instead, He has saddled him with burdensome loads of feelings and thoughts and made him carry weighty amounts of images and traces of the past along with various suppositions and imaginations about what he will have to bear in the future.

This is because Allah the Exalted has made man the master of this universe, and put him in charge of developing and planning the affairs of this life. To this end, He has subjugated for him that which is in the heavens and the earth and showered him with all kinds of blessings, outward and inward.

Planning the affairs of this worldly life can only be based on an imagination with which man remembers the past, a mind that warns him about events of the future and an intellect that blends the two and from which he can extract the principles of life and methods of planning.

The imagination visualises and man has no way of extricating himself from it. His thoughts predict and prognosticate and he cannot ignore or disregard them. Between these two, the intellect assesses and anticipates and he cannot free himself from it, and each of these three matters remain loaded with the means of good and evil as well as the pleasure and pain that this world is gushing forth with.

Therefore, the only people who possess the ability to free themselves from all of this are the insane. They are the elite, for they do not experience any of these distresses and anxieties.

Thus, this tool is denied to those who are sane, and Allah the Exalted has decreed that they be honoured above having this tool, which would necessitate that they lose that which distinguishes them above all other categories of animals.

The second way is for man to be certain of Allah's existence ﷻ. Then he should listen to His elucidation of man's reality and his identity, the story of this life, its origin and its phases, and of man's responsibility therein. Then he will realise that he is an owned slave – in every meaning of the word. He is owned by Allah the Exalted. He will be convinced of the existence of the Hereafter and the value of this worldly life in relation to it.

Then he will pause at the Exalted's statement:

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

"We test you with both good and evil as a trial. And you will be returned to Us." [al-Anbiyā' 21:35]

As well as His statement ﷻ:

﴿وَجَعَلْنَا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَتَصْبِرُونَ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ بَصِيرًا﴾

"But We have made some of you a trial for others to see if you will be steadfast. Your Lord sees everything." [al-Furqān 25:20]

If it were possible for him to resort to forgetfulness and hope, or to indifference and avoidance, his heart would be rid of these afflictions and thus not feel them, and he would not be distressed when bad things happen.

However, the Wise Bringer Into Being ﷻ did not will to give man, this noble and distinguished creation, this ability. Instead, He has saddled him with burdensome loads of feelings and thoughts and made him carry weighty amounts of images and traces of the past along with various suppositions and imaginations about what he will have to bear in the future.

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﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَآئِقَةُ ٱلْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِٱلشَّرِّ وَٱلْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

"We test you with both good and evil as a trial. And you will be returned to Us." [al-Anbiyā' 21:35]

As well as His statement ﷻ:

﴿وَجَعَلْنَا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَتَصْبِرُونَ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ بَصِيرًا﴾

"But We have made some of you a trial for others to see if you will be steadfast. Your Lord sees everything." [al-Furqān 25:20]

As well as His statement, ﷻ:

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ ٱلْخَوْفِ وَٱلْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ وَٱلْأَنفُسِ وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ﴾

"We will definitely test you with a certain amount of fear and hunger and loss of wealth and life and fruits. But give good news to the steadfast." [al-Baqarah 2:155]

From these statements, man understands his duty towards his Creator in this worldly life, which is to implement the reality of slave-hood to Allah ﷻ and to be pleased, in obedience and submission, with everything that has been decreed against him and imposed upon him. Thus, he will not be exasperated when a test afflicts him, and will not rebel against Allah's decision when any calamity encompasses him.

Then he will realise that Allah ﷻ is the wisest of judges and the most just of those who show justice, and thus He does not allow man's efforts for the sake of good to go to waste. He does not overlook any right that an oppressor has seized from him, nor does He pass over any wrongdoing that he has perpetrated or crime that he has committed. Rather, He will judge between His slaves in all matters on the promised Day of Recompense:

﴿فَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ ، وَمَن يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ﴾

"Whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it. Whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it." [al-Zalzalah 99:7-8]

This is the only way that allows man, if he wants to, to maintain the feelings of bliss and contentment within his soul regardless of the situations and circumstances he finds himself in.

It is the one remedy that Allah the Exalted has laid down for man in order for him to free himself from this problem that he asks about and which he seeks to be free of.

You are not able to control what happens in this universe, or to change or alter anything that Allah brings about according to His way of doing things. Ever since Allah created this universe, He has brought together within it manifestations of good and evil, of misery and felicity, of pleasure and pain. To this day, no one has been able to change a thing, or remove any harm or pain that has befallen him, and no one will ever be able.

However, you are able to control your feelings and emotions, from which the meaning of both good and bad is composed. You are able to control your feelings towards both by following the second way that I have summarised for you.

And this way is alluded to in his ḥadīth ﷺ: {How astonishing is the believer's affair! His entire affair is good, and this is only true for the believer. In times of ease, he is grateful and this is good for him. In times of difficulty, he is patient, and this is good for him.}

THE SECRET BEHIND ALL OF THIS

You might ask:

Why did Allah the Exalted want to load this worldly life with a mixture of good and evil, pleasure and pain, when He is able to adorn it with only the means of pleasure and free of distress and pain?

Indeed, why has Allah made man suffer with an intellect that bears all these burdens, such that he lives powerless and bewildered under their pressure, when it was not impossible for Allah the Exalted to make him bear the blessing of intellect without attaching any painful consequences? Indeed, why is perspicacity[6] connected to life's adversity and afflictions?

The answer:

Allah the Exalted wanted man to be the greatest manifestation of His divinity ﷻ and the most vivid articulation of the secret of this

6 Ar. *ma'rifah*

entire existence. The form through which Allah, according to His wisdom, wanted to manifest all of this was the development of the universe by way of sincere slavehood to Him.[7]

Implementing sincere slavehood to Allah cannot be done unless man is a slave to Allah the Exalted through his conduct and by choice, just as slavehood has been decreed for him by being created and through coercion.

In other words, by acknowledging the reality of the slavehood that is concealed within human nature, then coordinating and harmonising between this reality concealed within his essence and the way he voluntarily conducts himself in life, man submits to the meaning of his slavehood to Allah ﷻ.

This coordination and harmony are only manifested when man accepts the responsibilities that Allah the Exalted has placed upon him, i.e. by accepting to follow the way of life that contains discomfort and hardship, for nothing other than seeking to attain Allah's pleasure ﷻ.

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7 It is not for you to keep asking questions and say, 'So why did Allah want that?', because any answer given in response can be followed by the exact same question: 'So why did Allah want that?"

To keep delving into Allah the Exalted's actions by asking this question is a huge mistake, because you are imagining that there is something compelling Him to carry out something specific – the way we human beings are compelled – and thus you are striving to know the compelling reason. This is a mistaken fantasy and is totally uncalled for, because Allah the Exalted's will is complete and is not tarnished by any deficiency because of something compelling Him or making Him do something, as is the norm for humans.

You can only ask about the wisdom, which we have already clarified. Allah does what He wants and He is not asked about what He does, and that is one of the clearest requisites of divinity.

And none of this can be done unless man has all the means that render him competent, such as intellect, good sense and sound thinking, and then the hopes and fears that results from that.

As long as responsibilities are derived from life and what it contains, life must inevitably be a mixture of happiness and hardship, pleasure and pain.

Any suspicion or opposition towards what is being said here can only mean dissatisfaction with the responsibilities that Allah has ennobled man with.

No attention is to be paid to this kind of dissatisfaction. There is no logical way to discuss it. If someone objects by saying, 'Why has Allah made me His slave and not put me in control of my own affairs so that I can do what I want?', sound logic has no answer to his objection other than to direct him towards the Owner of this relationship.

Let him approach the Lord of Might ﷻ on the Day of Standing – if he wants – with this objection and ask Him why He made him His slave and did not put him in control of his affairs![8]

8 The one who raises this objection might not be a believer – from the innermost part of his soul – in Allah's ﷻ existence but whenever he does not disclose the reality of his rejection and deceives himself with this kind of talk, this is the sound logical answer.
When he is compelled to disclose his disbelief, all these branch fragments become a discussion that has no subject, because it is before its time. At that point, one must return to the beginning of the path and the foundation of the entire issue, which is looking into Allah's ﷻ existence.

THE SOURCE OF COMMANDMENTS AND HARDSHIPS

The basis of life's difficulties, upon which divine commandments arise, is in two matters.

There are the difficulties with which man is asked to be patient and steadfast with and there are the blessings regarding which man is asked to be grateful for and not completely immerse himself in.

Both of them come under the common denominator of life's hardships and difficulties.

You might think that the hardships of life are confined to the first category, and that the second is as remote as can be from the meaning of hardship and commandments. You might scoff and say, 'Who is tested by owning a massive amount of wealth and his heart does not dance with joy because of this test?'

However, you should know that this conception is a serious mistake, and it is because you have not understood what is meant by this test. Here is an explanation:

The pivot of the test for the one whom Allah has showered with blessings **is nothing other than the commandment to be grateful for them.**

The meaning of gratitude is not what you might think it is, merely moving the tongue in praise. Rather, it is man subjugating everything that Allah has blessed him with for that which he has been created.

In other words, he does not use any of these blessings for something that is not legislated, and it is not just that. He must use these blessings for that which he has been created. If he does not do so, and in making use of these blessings he deviates from the path that is incumbent upon him to follow, all these blessings turn into harms and misery afterwards.

An example of this would be a poor, destitute, needy man who desperately yearns for all kinds of ease and comfort. Then the state gives him great amounts of money but stipulates that he must be like a trustworthy guard with it. He must not spend more than he needs and within certain conditions. If he violates the conditions and spends too much, there will be severe consequences.

There is no doubt that when this man succeeds in controlling the inclinations of his soul, stays within the bounds that he is supposed to, keeps his hands away from the money that is under his authority and weans his soul off its aspirations and passions, he will be counted amongst the heroes, those who have control over themselves and those who prove their trustworthiness in the most trying of circumstances and situations.

Yes. There is a man who sees the various passions and delights of this world shining in front of him and tempting him behind several closed doors. He looks and finds that fate has placed the keys to all of these doors in his hands, and he does not use any of them apart from the one key that Allah has legislated for him. He leaves the other doors closed in front of him. All these delights are presenting themselves to him and he has access to them, but he is patient and turns away. This man suffers from a difficulty that surpasses the difficulty that is suffered by someone who is tested with poverty by compulsion and is reluctantly content with it.

The poor person who had no choice regarding his poverty can only treat it with patience, whether he wants to or does not want to.

Then there is the wealthy person, who has the keys to the various passions and delights, and he has tasted them and he knows how much his soul yearns for them. Then he rises above them and does not pay attention to them apart from that simple vow that meets the legislated conditions and restrictions that Allah ﷻ[9] has described. He thus has the virtue of this voluntary behaviour, which grants him a higher rank than the poor person who has no choice regarding his poverty.

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9 We say 'simple vow' because the legislated categories of worldly blessings and passions are considered – when compared with other matters – a simple vow, especially if you know that every luxury and comfort that preoccupies the slave from his Lord is harmful to man and will lead to an evil end.

This is the meaning of the Messenger of Allah's ﷺ statement, {This world is cursed and everything in it is cursed, apart from the remembrance of Allah and what follows it.}

However, in many cases, permissible matters themselves can be transformed and fall under categories of the unlawful. For example, one could use permissible matters for the sake of reputation and boasting, or they distract one from one's obligations and worship. Maybe there is a house that contains some fragments of that which is permissible, but these fragments are within a general framework of frivolity and turning away from Allah the Exalted's rights, withdrawing from the essence of slavehood to Him. Thus, it all becomes unlawful behaviour and immensely harmful.

Based on this, the majority of scholars have made consensus that the grateful and wealthy person is better in the sight of Allah the Exalted than the patient and poor person is.

This is because the truth is that both of them are patient, but one of them is patient with possessing that which can be used to acquire pleasure while the other is patient with not possessing such means.

To distinguish between the two, the first is called grateful and the other is called patient, and to elucidate how the former is better and rare, Allah the Exalted says, ﴿وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ ٱلشَّكُورُ﴾ **"But very few of My slaves are grateful."** [as-Saba' 34:13]

Therefore, this is how you know that being tested with wealth and the means of comfort and luxury are not less dangerous and difficult than being tested with poverty and the means of other adversities.

Contemplate on how Allah clarifies this reality, when He explains that tests are in both good and bad:

﴿كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَآئِقَةُ ٱلْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِٱلشَّرِّ وَٱلْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾

"We test you with both good and evil as a trial. And you will be returned to Us." [al-Anbiyā' 21:35]

THOSE WHO DO NOT UNDERSTAND THESE WORDS

Despite this, there is a group of people who do not understand a thing about the reality that we have clarified, and they are not convinced of it. Maybe they will mock and say,

'Let God distance me from the causes of harm and poverty. Then let Him test me with the adversities of wealth and riches as He wants, regardless of whether I pass or fail the test.'

In other words, in being tested with the blessings of this world, he sees nothing of the reality of hardship and difficulty that we have clarified.

This group's excuse is that they do not affirm – within the depths of their own souls – Allah's ﷻ existence and the Last Day, nor the reckoning that follows or the eternal felicity or punishment that is connected to how man conducts himself in this worldly life.

The pivot of our entire discussion, in explaining this subject, is absolute faith in the Creator's existence, the Unique, the One ﷻ, as well

as faith in the veracity of what He has informed us of in His Book and on the tongue of His Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. In fact, it also applies to all the Prophets that came before him ﷺ. We firmly believe that all of humanity will be resurrected after their death to stand before the Lord of all Creation, and each one of them will be rewarded for whatever good or evil they did in this worldly life.

As for those who do not take this fundamental pivot into account, it is very logical for them not to believe anything we are saying, because we are standing on the actual roots of this matter and they are not.

However, it is never logical for them to ignore this difference of opinion they have with us in this foundational logic, and then they waste precious time discussing this smaller, branch issue.

Nevertheless, we shall complete our explanation of this issue from all sides and considerations, and we say:

Being tested with blessings, according to the meaning that we have clarified, is not called a test by someone who has not understood the meaning of this existence as it truly is, and has not acknowledged his true identity and the story of his momentous journey in this universe.

In fact, it is natural for someone like this to apply himself to the various means of this worldly life that surrounds him, like a beast that has opened his eyes unto a trough in front of him and thus he sinks his head into it without understanding anything that surrounds him or what their purpose might be.

However, this person's ignorance does not change a thing about the reality that other people know and are certain of. If one of two men drinks water without knowing that it contains a lethal poison, that does not change the nature of the water or the poison that it contains. Furthermore, it does not render his colleague ignorant and doubtful if he is actually aware of the poison that has been mixed with the water and is thus wary of it.

Based on this disparity in knowledge, if this water were to be served to the second person in a glittering, enticing cup – while he is extremely thirsty – he would consider it a test that requires a certain amount of patience and firmness on his part. At the same time, the first person would see it as nothing but an immense blessing, causing him to rejoice. However, it is only a blessing in his own delusive imagination. It is not based on any foundation of objective logic that looks at the reality of the matter.

Thus, the person who sees this world as the sole opportunity for life, that there is no life that follows it, does not understand any meaning of the necessity to have patience with tests. He sees no reason to be grateful for whatever blessings he has in this world. Therefore, he cannot make himself bear any difficulty with patience or to be grateful for any good.

This category of people, whom you constantly see complaining about afflictions, are persistently seeking divine justice and looking for its outcome. This is because they do not understand any meaning of felicity and misery outside the confines of this worldly life, and therefore they will not be convinced by anything you say about the philosophy of patience or gratitude.

And they absolutely have the right not to understand what the believer in Allah understands about the meaning of patience and gratitude and the motives behind both.

We will explain the reason for both in what follows.

First, they have the right not to understand anything about patience:

In truth, patience is nothing more than attaching hope to some expected good. If there is no hope, there is no patience. In fact, at that point, patience has no meaning. At that point, bearing with hardship has no meaning other than coerced submission to some agony that has no benefit and no escape. It is understandable why someone in this situation feels suffocated or commits suicide.

The one who has been destined to walk through a dark, constricted cave and spend a long time therein, without expecting any end in which he can get some relief, a breath of fresh air or some light, is not considered to be in a state of patience, whether he is moving or standing still. Rather, he is moving – slowly or quickly – towards eruption or suffocation.

As for the one who moves through the middle of that same darkness and is certain that it is the one, normal path towards a lush, green garden with expansive shade, he does not sense everything around him except with a feeling of hope, which entices him, and when he looks at the darkness surrounding him, he only sees images of the light that awaits him.

This is the patience that Allah has enjoined upon His slaves in many of the verses in His Book.

It is not endless patience with constant, suffocating agony. Rather, it is patience on a path that cannot be avoided towards a destination the existence of which is not doubted. There is no dispute that man will end up at it. To the extent that Allah has commanded His slaves to have patience, He has also stressed to them the truth of hope and asserted to them that its content is true and real and that there is no doubt about it.

The one who keeps complaining from the dark cellar that he is walking through should complain about his own denial of the destination that awaits him beyond the darkness.

The one who wants to take Allah to account regarding His justice and how it is implemented in this worldly life should take himself to account first, for denying the day that is coming and of which there is no doubt. It is the day in which there will be reckoning after a long respite, a day in which divine justice will be manifested in the most perfect way and with the most exact judgements. They have the right not to understand any of this.

Secondly, they have the right not to understand anything about gratitude.

This is because confining oneself to the path of gratitude and its consequences also has no meaning for the one who does not believe in the existence of the One who should be shown gratitude. Or, he

believes in Him but does not fear His punishment if he is immersed in blessings that He has granted him but does not use them within specific bounds.

Someone like this acts within his own discretion, immersed in the din of blessings, running after gratification wherever it sparkles, and he imagines that that is happiness.

However, his state is not considered a true standard for happiness – as we have clarified – but rather his happiness is a delusional fancy based on his imagination, the imagination of someone who has gone far astray and ignored where he will end up.

Every intelligent person knows that the one who enjoys a forbidden blessing is threatened by the One who never lies or breaks His promises. His state is not enviable and he is only considered happy in his personal delusive imagination because of his ignorance regarding his final destination.

As for the one who believes in Allah, and affirms His promise and His punishment, he is led by the combination of his faith in Allah motivating him along with either his love of Him or his fear of Him. He is led to restrain himself within the bounds of gratitude and then he also finds himself being led to patience in the same way, hoping for the reward and recompense that he is certain of. This is the test.

NO CONSIDERATION IS GIVEN TO THE CONTINGENT MATTERS OF THIS WORLDLY LIFE

The contingent matters of this worldly life are everything it contains by way of manifestations of wealth, luxury, opulence, and the various worldly arts and exploits.

These aspects are of no consideration. Allah the Exalted grants them to both His righteous slaves and His disavowing enemies.

Rather, consideration is given to the state the slave has ascended to, making every means that he reaches for in this worldly life a ladder towards Allah's pleasure ﷻ.

The slave who reaches this state is happy, even if you see him suffering – from your point of view – under various kinds of afflictions and tragedies. He is also strong, even if you see him – in your delusive imagination – as weak, unable to make anyone fear him or ward off an enemy. He is wealthy, even if his outward state suggests to you that he is poor and lowly.

At the hands of people like this, Allah demolished the kingdoms of Khosrau and Heraclius.

Under the protection of these people, Allah established an empire whose power and expanse history had never seen the like of.

Out of awe of these people, the hearts of the mighty and powerful in this world trembled.

And despite all of this, the leader of these people preferred not to swap his shabby rags for something else, and one of the soldiers in his army refused to meet the leader of the Persian army dressed in other than his ripped garment while riding an undressed horse.[10]

When someone came to the Commander of the Believers[11] to speak to him, hoping that he would dress up before meeting the leaders of Rome, his teeth chattered out of anger and he said to him:

'Alas, if someone other than you, Abū 'Ubaydah, had said this, I would have made him an exemplary punishment for the Muslims. Allah has made us mighty with Islam. Whenever we seek might from other than what Allah has made us mighty with, Allah humiliates us.'

Makkah, from which the Islamic conquests started and conquered lofty palaces in Babylon, remained a desolate valley with no abundant vegetation and no beautiful buildings.

10 This is Rab'ī ibn 'Āmir when he met Rustum, the leader of the Persian army, at the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah

11 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ﷺ.

The Prophet, from whose legislation a towering civilisation extended across the known world at that time, remained unlettered, not reading or writing, in the midst of an unlettered nation most of whom did not know how to read or write.

This is how things were for some time. This worldly life was conveyed to them and they subjugated it to Allah's rule, the way of His religion and the authority of His legislation, without any of that being attached to their egos or taking over their hearts.

This was until love of this world penetrated the hearts of their successors, and they immediately started to compete in worldly matters and show off its embellishments. They gave it a position of leadership over their lives, and their own power dwindled. The awe that people had for them faded, and they became divided after being united.

The kingdom of Andalusia folded and those who had ruled it and been in charge of its affairs were forced to flee. Their lofty palaces were of no benefit, nor were their splendid ornaments, their abundant wealth and their sublime civilisation.

The Abbasid Empire broke up and turned into quarrelling petty states that would eat one another, without the vast, sublime kingdom being of any benefit, nor the vast overflowing wealth, the massive army or the advancement of the sciences and the arts.

So what does this all mean?

It means that Islam – in its pure essence – is the origin of power, the foundation of wealth and source of civilisation and knowledge.

It means that no consideration is given to power, wealth or civilisation if they are all stripped of sound religion, for they were all shattered one day under the hooves of the Muslims' horses, for no reason other than that they were the horses of the Muslims.

If these words are clear and obvious, no one can regard them as dubious and say, 'So why do the nations of disbelief and injustice move about freely with the blessings of immense wealth, fierce power and extraordinary sciences while the Muslims, on the other hand, have nothing but intense poverty, astonishing weakness and ignorance of everything?'

We say that this question should never be asked, for the following two reasons:

The first reason is that the blessings and amenities of this worldly life, whatever their type, are not a standard – as we have said – in Allah's Revealed Law and His rule. They are not a measuring stick for the happiness of nations or Allah being pleased with them, nor do they tell us the extent of their power and authority on earth, even though these nations today, for another reason, are enjoying the utmost power and might.

Allah the Exalted has said to His Messenger Muḥammad ﷺ:

﴿لَا يَغُرَّنَّكَ تَقَلُّبُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ فِى ٱلْبِلَـٰدِ ۚ مَتَـٰعٌ قَلِيلٌ ثُمَّ مَأْوَىٰهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۚ وَبِئْسَ ٱلْمِهَادُ﴾

"Do not be deceived by the fact those who disbelieve move freely about the earth. A brief enjoyment; then their shelter will be the Fire. What an evil resting-place!" [Āl 'Imrān 3:196-197]

He ﷻ has said,

﴿وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓاْ أَنَّمَا نُمْلِى لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ
إِنَّمَا نُمْلِى لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوٓاْ إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ﴾

"Those who disbelieve should not imagine that the extra time We grant to them is good for them. We only allow them more time so they will increase in evil-doing. They will have a humiliating punishment." [Āl 'Imrān 3:178]

He ﷻ has also said,

﴿أَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّمَا نُمِدُّهُم بِهِۦ مِن مَّالٍ وَبَنِينَ . نُسَارِعُ لَهُمْ فِى ٱلْخَيْرَٰتِ بَل لَّا يَشْعُرُونَ﴾

"Do they imagine that, in the wealth and children we extend to them, We are hastening to them with good things? No indeed, but they have no awareness!" [al-Mu'minūn 23:55-56]

He ﷻ has also said,

﴿زُيِّنَ لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُواْ ٱلْحَيَوٰةُ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَيَسْخَرُونَ مِنَ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ
وَٱلَّذِينَ ٱتَّقَوْاْ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ وَٱللَّهُ يَرْزُقُ مَن يَشَآءُ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ﴾

"To those who disbelieve, the life of this world is painted in glowing colours and they laugh at those who believe. But on the Day of Standing, those who fear Allah will be over them. Allah provides for whomever He wills without any reckoning." [al-Baqarah 2:212]

He has said about the disbelievers,

﴿سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُم مِّنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ . وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ﴾

"We will lead them, step by step, into destruction from where they do not know. I will give them more time. My strategy is sure." [al-'A'rāf 7:182-183]

He draws attention to how low and insignificant this world is in the sight of Allah ﷻ:

﴿وَلَوْلَآ أَن يَكُونَ ٱلنَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَٰحِدَةً لَّجَعَلْنَا لِمَن يَكْفُرُ بِٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ
لِبُيُوتِهِمْ سُقُفًا مِّن فِضَّةٍ وَمَعَارِجَ عَلَيْهَا يَظْهَرُونَ﴾

"Were it not that mankind might all become one community, We would have given those who reject the All-Merciful silver roofs to their houses and silver stairways to ascend, as well as 'silver' gates and thrones to recline on," [az-Zukhruf 43:33-35][12]

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ passed by a dead young billy goat in the market. He then took it by the ear and said, {Which of you would like to have this for a dirham?} They replied, 'We do not want any part of it. What would we do with it?' He then said, {By Allah, this world is lower in the sight of Allah than this is to you.}

12 (tn): The following two verses are:
﴿وَلِبُيُوتِهِمْ أَبْوَابًا وَسُرُرًا عَلَيْهَا يَتَّكِئُونَ . وَزُخْرُفًا وَإِن كُلُّ ذَٰلِكَ لَمَّا مَتَٰعُ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَٱلْءَاخِرَةُ عِندَ رَبِّكَ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾
"and silver doors to their houses and silver couches on which to recline, and gold ornaments. All that is merely the trappings of the life of this world. But the Next World with your Lord is for those who have *taqwā*." [az-Zukhruf 43:34-35]

If the blessings and amenities of this world were the path to having a strong empire and a united Ummah that is protected against the ambitious designs of aggressors, the Muslims, under the leadership of their Prophet and their Rightly-Guided Caliphs, would have obtained the greatest share of these blessing, and they would have moved about freely in luxury and vast sustenance.

However, they were the complete opposite of this.

The nations of Persia and Rome had the amenities and splendour that you know about. 'Three months would pass by and no fire for cooking food would be lit in the Messenger of Allah's ﷺ house. He ﷺ passed away and he was never satiated from bread and oil twice in one day.'[13]

The enemies' fortresses collapsed in the face of the Muslim conquests while the Muslims were living a life of ruggedness and intense poverty, and their enemies were engrossed in all kinds of luxury and comfort.

Imam Muslim ﷺ has related with his own chain of transmission from Sa'd Ibn Abī Waqqāṣ that he said, 'By Allah, I am the first Arab man to fire an arrow for Allah's sake. We would go into battle with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and we would have no food to eat apart from the leaves of the *ḥublah*[14] tree and the *samur*[15] tree, until one of us would lie down the way a sheep lies down.'

13 Related by Muslim

14 (tn): this most likely refers to what is known as *acacia ehrenbergiana*

15 (tn): i.e. the umbrella thorn acacia

Muslim has also related from 'Utbah Ibn Ghazwān ﷺ that he said in one of his public addresses, 'I saw myself as the seventh of seven with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. We had nothing to eat apart from tree leaves, until our jawbones became ulcerated. I gathered a cloak and split it between Sa'd ibn Mālik and myself; I wore half and Sa'd wore the other half. Today, there is not a single one of us except that he has become a ruler over one of the major cities. I seek refuge in Allah that I be great in my own estimation and small in the sight of Allah. There has never been any prophethood except that it came to an end, and was eventually replaced by kings. You will test the rulers after us and be tested by them.'

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ says, {Give glad tidings and raise hopes of that which pleases you, for by Allah, I do not fear poverty for you. Rather, I fear that this world will be spread out for you as it was spread out for those before you, and thus you will compete for it as they competed for it and it will destroy you as it destroyed them.}[16]

Therefore, the Muslims' poverty, backwardness and bad worldly state was never, at any time, something that prevented them from reaching the highest ranks of power and victory. On the contrary, abundant wealth in their hands followed by the means of luxury and urbaneness were never a factor in their success.

Rather, wealth and the opulence that follows it was, and still is, a source of trial and tribulation, which the Muslims were able to

16 Agreed upon

withstand for some time. Then it was not long before their feet slipped and they fell into its dangerous trap and they were surrounded by that which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had warned them against.

This opulence in and of itself, in its various manifestations, could never be a fortress that would protect the Persians or the Romans and those like them against the power and might of the Muslims. Instead, it was all dispersed under the feet of the Muslims and the "miracle" of the Islamic conquest was realised, as Western historians put it.[17]

It has thus been made clear to you that manifestations of worldly opulence, in every sense of the word, be it urbaneness, wealth, the arts and even various worldly sciences, have nothing to do with what Allah has promised the Muslims by way of success, might and victory. They have no connection to their rank with Allah or His love for them.

The second reason is that the Muslims today are not the Muslims of yesterday, when Allah granted them the "miracle" of the conquest. They are not those whom Allah promised to grant victory and support, such as when He ﷻ said,

﴿وَعَدَ ٱللَّهُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ مِنكُمْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ
لَيَسْتَخْلِفَنَّهُمْ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ كَمَا ٱسْتَخْلَفَ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ ...﴾

17 Westerners call the Islamic conquest a "miracle" because they do not understand these divine standards and laws, which necessitated victory for the Muslims. The issue remains difficult for them to justify and analyse, so they call it a "miracle".
As for us, we know that the issue is connected to a law and system that are prevalent in every time and place, but their first statute is faith in Allah ﷻ along with affirmation of His Book and the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ.

"Allah has promised those of you who believe and do right actions that He will make them successors in the land as He made those before them successors..." [an-Nūr 24:55]

Today, they are some other, astonishing specimen. They colour themselves with Islam by using certain expressions and slogans within specific stipulations, and then they are not pleased to follow anything concerning its legislation and rulings.

They complain about all its values, structures and limits, simply because it is old and was not born yesterday within the totality of what Western civilisation has produced. Instead of it, they ardently desire everything new that has emerged in the midst of these enemies, about whose ascendancy the reader asks, simply because it is something modern that has been touched by the blessed hand of the West!

All kinds of wrong have become prevalent amongst them, such that they have become right and beloved to them. That which is right has become concealed amongst them, such that it has become wrong and disapproved of in their view.

So, what right do these people have to ask Allah the Exalted for victory when in return they give Him an ***Islam*** that they only adhere to in the form of trivialities and false claims, in addition to what they plot against its sacred principles and rulings?

However, you might ask: This is a reason why Allah ﷻ has abandoned the Muslims, but why has Allah the Exalted assisted their enemies in every field when they, at any rate, are worse than these Muslims are?

The answer is that Allah the Exalted's standard practice necessitated that this world keep moving with its people, and that they keep building it and developing their livelihoods, until Allah the Exalted's promise comes and the appointed time arrives for it to be effaced and annihilated.

In terms of developing the earth and leading it, the believers in Allah who establish His limits and rulings and the disbelieving nations that transgress against these limits and rulings are like two sides of a scale: if one side goes down, the other side must go up.

When the believers in Allah are sincere in their faith, loyal to Allah's way and legislation in their daily affairs, Allah the Exalted makes them the leaders of this life and makes them responsible for its development. He extracts for them the means of might and support from where they never expect, while everyone else falls behind and under their authority.

When the believers change, and thus neglect Allah's legislation and rule, when their hearts do not sincerely accord with what their tongues claim, when that which is wrong overflows to such an extent that no one stands against it, when that which is right becomes something strange such that they have an aversion to it, Allah the Exalted transfers the leadership and development of this life to other nations. He gives those nations power over them, with subjugation, fragmentation and humiliation.

And so forth, for the world cannot stop moving and developing just because certain people retreat and abandon their responsibilities.

Instead, it keeps progressing and developing as Allah's standard practice has decreed. However, its leadership is transferred from their hands to the hands of others.

Contemplate this divine standard practice and how it is patently obvious in the Exalted's statement:

﴿وَكَذَٰلِكَ نُوَلِّي بَعْضَ ٱلظَّٰلِمِينَ بَعْضًۢا بِمَا كَانُوا۟ يَكْسِبُونَ﴾

"In that way We give some wrongdoers authority over other wrongdoers because of what they have done." [al-Anʿām 6:129]

In this statement of His ﷻ, He is explaining this same standard practice to the Children of Israel, and warning them against falling into its consequences:

﴿وَقَضَيْنَآ إِلَىٰ بَنِىٓ إِسْرَٰٓءِيلَ فِى ٱلْكِتَٰبِ لَتُفْسِدُنَّ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا ۝ فَإِذَا جَآءَ وَعْدُ أُولَىٰهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَّنَآ أُو۟لِى بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ فَجَاسُوا۟ خِلَٰلَ ٱلدِّيَارِ ۚ وَكَانَ وَعْدًا مَّفْعُولًا﴾

"We decreed in the Book for the Children of Israel: 'You will twice cause corruption in the earth and you will rise to a great height. When the promised first time came, We sent against you slaves of Ours possessing great force, and they ransacked your houses, rampaging right through them. It was a promise that was fulfilled." [al-Isrā' 17:4-5]

He finishes by saying,

﴿عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يَرْحَمَكُمْ وَإِنْ عُدتُّمْ عُدْنَا وَجَعَلْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَـٰفِرِينَ حَصِيرًا﴾

"It may well be that your Lord will have mercy on you. But if you revert to what you did, We will also revert. We have made the Fire a prison for the unbelievers." [al-Isrā' 17:8]

Contemplate this same divine principle in his words ﷺ {If you engage in a deceitful trade, become satisfied with raising livestock and crops, and dislike striving,[18] Allah will put humiliation in authority over you and He will not remove it until you return to your religion.} Humiliation, as you know, can only be through putting someone in charge who subjugates and humiliates.

Let us look at what the Commander of the Believers, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, said to Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ when he was departing from the Battle of al-Qādisiyyah. He was explaining this weighty matter to him, appealing to him to keep his army away from the deviations and slips that would make them liable to falling into the grip of oppressors.

Part of what he said was, 'O Sa'd, the son of Umm Sa'd, do not let yourself be deceived because they call you the paternal uncle of the Messenger of Allah, for indeed Allah does not replace evil with evil but rather He replaces evil with good. There is no connection between Allah and any individual except through obedience to Him. I command you and those with you to be warier of yourselves than of your enemy, for the sins of the army are a greater threat to them than their actual

18 Ar. *jihād*

enemy. The Muslims are only given victory because of their enemy's disobedience of Allah. If that were not the case, we would have no power against them, because our numbers are not like their numbers and our equipment is not like their equipment. If we are equal in disobedience, then they have a power that is superior to ours. If we are not victorious over them because of our merit, we will never get the better of them because of our power. Do not say that our enemy is worse than us, and thus they will never be granted authority over us, for it is often the case that a people are put under the authority of someone worse than them. For example, when the Children of Israel committed disobedience, Allah put them under the authority of the disbelieving Magians, who ransacked and rampaged through their houses and it was a promise that was fulfilled.'[19]

The founder of the Ottoman Empire, the warrior 'Uthmān ibn Ertuğrul, had an immense amount of experience in this reality. He saw with his own eyes how this divine standard practice controls the flow of history and the conflicts between nations, so much so that when his death was approaching, he turned to his son and squeezed out this reality for him from his experiences, giving him some rare, exquisite advice, part of which was:

'Take this lesson from me. When I came to this land, I was as weak as an ant, and then Allah granted me these majestic blessings.

19 If only those who are skilled in applauding and singing the praises of al-Qādisiyyah today were skilled in understanding this "strategy" that was the secret behind the Muslims' victory. If only they were honest with themselves just once, they would not praise the glories of al-Qādisiyyah and then wage war against the values and principles that were the first and last reason why al-Qādisiyyah is forever mentioned in the history of the Arabs and the Muslims.

Adhere to my way and follow my example. Strive to strengthen this Muhammadan religion and to respect its people. '[20] This is thus the obligation of kings on earth.

Despite all of this, you should know that the current state of affairs should not be deemed a victory or superiority for the unbelievers over

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20 Allow me to substantiate the text of this advice as it is quoted in the book *Abu al-Fath as-Sultani Muhammad ath-Thani* by 'Ali Himmat, which has been translated into Arabic by Muhammad Ihsan 'Abdul 'Aziz. It will draw your attention to many lessons, explain to you many of the meanings behind events and increase your faith in the justice of the Most High, the Supreme, who says in His Masterful Book, ﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُغَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنفُسِهِمْ﴾ **"Allah never changes a people's state until they change what is in themselves."** [ar-Ra'd 13:11]
The full text is as follows:
'Give precedence to the Religion over everything else, and do not slacken in persevering therein. Do not employ people who do not care about the Religion, do not avoid major sins and are immersed in iniquity. Avoid harmful innovations and distance yourself from those who provoke you towards it and towards oppression. Expand our territory by way of armed combat (*jihad*), guard the money of the Muslim treasury against waste and strive to increase the wealth of the empire.
Have compassion for the men of the empire who have devoted their lives to serving it with honesty and sincerity. Grant your protection to their children and progeny. Safeguard for the destitute their food, do not stretch your hand towards the wealth of any of your subjects and offer your compassion and generosity especially to those who deserve it. Strive to use the troops of the army well and to grant them sufficient rest.
The scholars and men of letters are the force that is dissipated throughout the body of the empire, so be kind to them and encourage them. If you hear that one of them is in another country, summon him and ennoble him with wealth and generosity so that he comes to reside in your country.
Beware, beware of being deceived by wealth and soldiers! Do not banish the people of the Revealed Law from your door, and do not incline towards any action that contravenes the rulings of the Revealed Law. The Religion is our objective and guidance is our way. Take this lesson from me. When I came to this land, I was as weak as an ant, and then Allah granted me these majestic blessings. Adhere to my way and follow my example. Strive to strengthen this Muhammadan religion and to respect its people along with the rest of your obedient subjects. Do not spend more than is necessary from the finances of the empire, do not withhold your sincere advice from your successors and relieve your subjects from oppression.
When I die, bury me under the silver dome in Bursa. If anyone entrusts you with something that Allah has not commanded, do not accept it, and if you do not know something concerning knowledge of the Religion, ask someone who does.'

the Muslims. Rather, the truth is that they have been put in charge or given authority,[21] as the Divine Exposition has stated. There is a big difference between victory and being put in charge.

It is not conceivable that Allah the Exalted would ennoble the nations that disobey His Revealed Law and rule with true victory and triumph at any time in history, or in any place on earth.

Allah the Exalted might show them some of the universe's secrets and knowledge, but to that same extent, they plunge into even deeper ignorance of the most manifest facts connected to their final destination. How truthful is the elucidation of the Wise Bringer Into Existence when He says about them,

﴿يَعْلَمُونَ ظَٰهِرًا مِّنَ ٱلْحَيَوٰةِ ٱلدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ ٱلْءَاخِرَةِ هُمْ غَٰفِلُونَ﴾

"They know an outward aspect of the life of this world but are heedless of the next world." [ar-Rūm 30:7]

For a certain period of time, Allah might grant them the keys of rulership and the destinies of the universe, and will subjugate many of the laws of nature to them, but it only lasts long enough for them to become inebriated by it and forget their essence, and become heedless of the abyss that they are on the verge of.

How magnificent is this elucidation from the Lord of the skies and the earth:

21 Ar. ***tawliyah***, please see Sūrat al-An'ām 6:129

﴿وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَآ إِلَىٰٓ أُمَمٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ فَأَخَذْنَـٰهُم بِٱلْبَأْسَآءِ وَٱلضَّرَّآءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَضَرَّعُونَ ,
فَلَوْلَآ إِذْ جَآءَهُم بَأْسُنَا تَضَرَّعُوا۟ وَلَـٰكِن قَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ ٱلشَّيْطَـٰنُ مَا كَانُوا۟
يَعْمَلُونَ , فَلَمَّا نَسُوا۟ مَا ذُكِّرُوا۟ بِهِۦ فَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ أَبْوَٰبَ كُلِّ شَىْءٍ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا فَرِحُوا۟ بِمَآ أُوتُوٓا۟
أَخَذْنَـٰهُم بَغْتَةً فَإِذَا هُم مُّبْلِسُونَ﴾

"We sent Messengers to nations before you, and afflicted those nations with hardship and distress so that hopefully they would humble themselves. If only they had humbled themselves when our violent force came upon them! However, their hearts were hard and Shayṭān made what they were doing attractive to them. When they forgot what they had been reminded of, We opened up for them the doors to everything, until, when they were exulting in what they had been given, We suddenly seized them and at once they were in despair." [al-Anʿām 6:42-44]

Yes, it would be of the utmost ignorance to call any of these aspects victory, triumph or true superiority.

If that does appear to be the case, ignorance of reality does not change reality, for the one walking through a fragrant garden with verdant shade towards his death is still heading towards his death, regardless of whether he pays attention to the flowers and sweet basil around him or he senses his final destination and evil end.

These words are not for entertainment or bedtime stories, seeking to make the Muslims feel content with their situation by disparaging the condition of their enemies. What is intended is the opposite: to

analyse the reality of the situation that the Muslims are living in and to give an accurate presentation of the problem and its solutions, for which there is no alternative.

Whether we consider the dominion of the Western world over them to be loftiness and victory or we consider it to be Allah granting respite and slowly leading them towards destruction, what cannot be doubted is that they have been given authority over them with subjugation and humiliation, and that the Muslims live humiliated under their grip, within their spheres of influences, or under the rule of total dependence on their ways and methods.

This is not some decree that befell them for no reason and without them having any choice. Rather, it is part of the consequences of what they have earned and what their own hands have perpetrated.

Allah does not oppress anyone. It is people who oppress themselves.

The means of escaping this humiliation are clear and known to the one who truly wants to escape from it and travel the path of might and victory, and resorting to any other means of liberation from this humiliation is nothing other than indulging in false hopes that barely satisfy the imaginations of children.

UPON WHAT BASIS DOES TRIBULATION VARY?

In what we clarified before, we arrived at the fact that most aspects of this worldly life fall under what is called trial or tribulation, whether they are good or bad, and they both have branches and categories.

Allah the Exalted's Book makes this absolutely clear when He says, ﴿وَنَبْلُوكُم بِٱلشَّرِّ وَٱلْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ﴾ **"We test you with both good and evil as a trial. And you will be returned to us."** [al-Anbiyā' 21:35]

However, upon what basis are these trials dispersed amongst people, as groups and as individuals, such that so-and-so's share is wealth and fame, someone else's share is poverty and weakness and another person's share is chronic illness?

Recognising that all of this has a common denominator, which is trial and tribulation, does not mean that they are equal in how they affect the soul. Rather, there is a clear difference in the matter, and thus there must be reassurance that the distribution of these trials amongst people is just by knowing the law according to which they are distributed.

In answering, we say that the diversity of trials, in and of themselves, is necessary for the essence of what is called trial and tribulation to be realised. The tribulation of poverty does not exist unless it is placed next to the tribulation of wealth. The tribulation of wealth and how to spend it cannot be realised unless it is next to poverty and need. Were it not for illness and its agonies, the blessings of health and well-being would never be apparent. Were it not for the joy of well-being and a healthy body that people know about, they would not be terrified of disease and pain.

Thus, every aspect of this worldly life can only acquire the essentials of its existence in relation to something else. If there were no diversity and all aspects were the same, it is not only the characteristic of trial and tribulation that would be lost but also the secret behind our attachment to these aspects and our reliance on them. Instead, we would just be bored and annoyed.

If this worldly life – according to Allah's judgment and will – is the abode of trial and tribulation, the Wise Bringer Into Existence ﷻ has established this life upon this diversity and intermixing between all of its particular characteristics and requirements. The existence of each one is strengthened by the existence of the other, and thus the right conditions are there for His slaves to carry out the function He has made incumbent upon them, which is to implement slavehood in all of their various worldly affairs and activities.

As for how they are distributed, i.e. the types of trials and tribulations that might afflict someone and not afflict someone else, this is based on a brilliant wisdom that is connected to the way Allah the Exalted nurtures His slaves.

The trial of poverty can be what is needed to remedy a person's relationship with Allah the Exalted, while it can be a calamitous disease for others. Constant health can facilitate the perpetration of injustice and evil for some groups of people, while for others it can be a means of goodness and uprightness.

When we say "goodness", "benefit" and "happiness", we do not mean anything that agrees with people's desires and what they imagine to be the meaning of goodness, benefit and happiness. Rather, we mean the goodness that Allah the Exalted knows to be goodness, regardless of whether or not it agrees with people's desires.

Allah the Exalted says,

﴿وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تَكْرَهُوا۟ شَيْـًٔا وَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ ۖ وَعَسَىٰٓ أَن تُحِبُّوا۟ شَيْـًٔا وَهُوَ شَرٌّ لَّكُمْ ۗ وَٱللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ﴾

"It may be that you hate something when it is good for you and it may be that you love something when it is bad for you. Allah knows and you do not know." [al-Baqarah 2:216]

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ says, {Allah protects His believing slave from this worldly life and He loves him, just as He protects one of you from his illness.}[22]

What these words mean is that no consideration is given to whether the slave is pleased or not, because the One nurturing knows about the

22 Related by at-Tirmidhī, who declared it good (*ḥasan*), and al-Ḥākim, who declared it authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*)

state of the one He is nurturing what the person himself does not know. If this were not the case, Allah would not be the Nurturer, and one of His most sublime names and attributes is *ar-Rabb*,[23] i.e. the nurturer.

When a child is raised in his parents' house, he is compelled to behave in a certain way and do many things that he dislikes, and he is denied many delights and pleasures that he yearns for.

Perhaps you cannot make him feel certain that all of this is for his own good and benefit and for the sake of his future, because his thinking is limited and might not be able to understand and digest this. However, when he has passed the stages of childhood, his intellect will become aware of the meanings of life that surround him and he will thus understand their nature and particular characteristics, until he becomes grateful for that which he used to be annoyed and feel restricted by.

Man's relationship with his Lord ﷻ is far worthier than the child's relationship with his parents or guardian.

When you realise that this is the case, you will not have doubts about your Lord based on the trials and tribulations with which He administers His slaves, regardless of whether the wisdom in some of them is apparent to you or hidden from you. Know that Allah the Exalted is wise; He does not choose to place anything where it does not belong.[24]

23 i.e. the Lord

24 We say: with the knowledge that Allah is the Creator of everything, and the Creator of the attributes of probity or corruption therein, and His creation and His arrangement only follow His wisdom

He is a nurturer; He is not harsh with His slave unless it is to wake him up from some destructive heedlessness, or to correct him after he has fallen into some deviation.

How many people have we seen who lived the first part of their lives heedless about Allah? They were intoxicated by luxuries, made haughty by well-being and made reckless by wealth. Then Allah the Exalted tested them with physical illnesses, or diminished their wealth, and thus the trial woke them up, shook them and gradually they came back to the fold of slavehood to the Wise Bringer Into Existence ﷻ. Then Allah ﷻ compensated them for the good that they lost with intimacy with Him, and the delight of turning to His guidance. Look at any of them and they are immersed in felicity, contentment, and the delight of turning to Allah ﷻ.

How many tyrants have we seen strutting about as if they are gods because they were granted power and its means, which made them forget that they are Allah's ﷻ humble slaves. When they were stripped of their power and made to step down from their positions of authority, after which they were surrounded by prison walls or in some place of exile, it only took a few days for them to remember the truth that they had been heedless of. They looked at themselves and came to know themselves after a long period of ignorance. Then they rectified their state with Allah ﷻ by wilfully accepting their slavehood to Allah and having absolute faith in His lordship and rule.

How many a man has lived his life without ever knowing what it is like to beg at the door of the All-Merciful, having never stretched out and asked Allah from deep within, having never felt the blessing of

humility before the One who sustains the skies and the earth, because blessings would come to him easily from every direction and therefore nothing would lead him to humbly ask and beg like a true slave.

When Allah tested them with an affliction in which neither a friend's love or a doctor's sincerity were of any benefit, the wealth of the world could not save them and nor could the leadership positions of leaders or the forces of the powerful, they remembered their Master besides whom there is no master, and those they would call on besides Him vanished.[25] They thus hastened to Allah's door, wallowing in sorrow at His doorstep and calling on Him from the depths of a broken heart: 'I have come back to you, my Lord, after a long period of wickedness and remoteness. I have put on the garment of slavehood to You and crouched down in broken humiliation before You. I have woken up to the sublimity of Your precedence and the profundity of Your bounty and kindness.'

When faith has illuminated the darkness that was in his heart, he starts tasting the pleasure of closeness to Allah and the sweetness of intimate conversation. He forgets about the request that brought him there and he stays put, desiring nothing other than to be near to Allah, and he would not sell the sweetness of what his heart witnesses for all the luxuries this world contains.

I have not forgotten, for as long as I have lived, a great man whose life Allah divided into two halves. In the first half, there were abundant blessings and perfect health. In the second half, he was afflicted with a chronic illness that he could not escape from. This illness brought him

25 (tn): this is a paraphrase of Sūrat al-Isrā' 17:67

to Allah's doorstep ﷻ and revived his heart by increasing the delight it felt in remembering its Lord, loving Him and witnessing Him. He would say to those around him, 'I testify before you that I do not want my health to be restored if health will cause me to lose the sweetness of being near to Allah.' I felt that he said this from the depths of his heart, and he meant it with every fibre of his soul.

The slave attains the pleasure of this nearness to his Lord ﷻ when Allah turns to him and loves him. Allah turns to him on account of his brokenness and accepting the humility of slavehood to Him. This brokenness might not come about unless that person experiences some type of privation, or he is threatened by the spectre of some affliction befalling his wealth, his person or his family.

If Allah had willed, He would have created these feelings of slavehood and brokenness in every person's heart, without any of them having to earn or strive. However, you know from what we have mentioned that Allah's will is connected to placing man in a position of accountability, and there can be no accountability without earning and striving in circumstances that contain some inconvenience, difficulty and hardship.

Perhaps you have looked at the state that people are in. You see their circumstances and it makes you think that this divine standard practice has some anomalies and thus you doubt the veracity of what we have said. It is like finding some disobedient people who are immersed in their disobedience and they are never woken up by these tribulations and agonies. On the other hand, you find some people who

are as pious and upright as can be and they are always suffering from some affliction. You could also find some stubborn disbelievers who have completely renounced faith and they live in the midst of comfort and luxury.

Know that this divine standard practice does not bear any lagging or anomalies. However, you cannot perceive its application within the particulars of events and individuals. You do not know what state people are in and how they really conduct themselves. You only know that which is apparent. As for that which is secret and hidden from you, only Allah knows.

How do you know that this disobedient person, whose disobedience warrants that he be woken up from it, does not have some state of probity with Allah the Exalted that expiates all those sins?

How do you know that the person you regard as more upright is actually like that with Allah?

Maybe an idea that one makes one have bad etiquette regarding Allah the Exalted's right and His immense attributes is graver and worse in the sight of Allah ﷻ – as Imam al-Ghazālī says – than drinking wine, engaging in fornication and committing all other major sins. You cannot see or sense this idea, while these acts of disobedience are clear and obvious.

Sheikh Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh al-Askandarī ﷺ says in his sublime *Ḥikam*, 'Disobedience that results in humility and brokenness is better than obedience that results in pride and arrogance.'[26]

How would you know about the disobedience that makes a person feel humble and broken and the obedience that makes a person feel proud and arrogant?

However, when disobedience gets out of control and the person no longer sees its gravity and instead becomes accustomed to it, such that Allah's anger becomes severe as a result (and Allah knows about people's disobedience and their states), Allah sets that person's punishment aside for the Day of Standing. No affliction in this worldly life can expiate his wickedness. At that point, the luxuries of this life become more abundant to him and engulf him, and this person becomes more immersed in and devoted to them. He never, at any point, wakes up to the reality of who he is and his final destination.

This is what is known as *istidrāj*,[27] which is mentioned in the Divine Exposition when Allah ﷻ says:

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26 This statement does not mean that disobedience might be better than obedience in certain situations. Rather, disobedience is always worse and obedience is always better. What is meant here is that disobedience that results in the disobedient person feeling regret and humility before Allah, until his soul feels broken, Allah will wipe out those sins if he does not return to their like. Obedience that results in the obedient person being arrogant and haughty towards others will cause all the reward and its effects to be wiped from his record. Thus, the disobedient person, because of his remorse and brokenness, attains the reward of repentance, while the obedient person, because of his boastfulness and haughtiness, attains the sin of arrogance and conceit.

27 (tn): i.e. to be gradually led into destruction

﴿سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُم مِّنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ . وَأُمْلِي لَهُمْ إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ﴾ **"We will lead them, step by step, into destruction from where they do not know. I will allow them more time. My subterfuge is sure."** [al-Qalam 68:44-45]

He also says,

﴿ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا . وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُ مَالًا مَّمْدُودًا . وَبَنِينَ شُهُودًا .

وَمَهَّدتُّ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا . ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ﴾

"Leave the person I created on his own to Me, alone, him to whom I have given great wealth and sons who stay with him, and whose way I have smoothed. Then he wants Me to add yet more!" [al-Muddaththir 74:11-15]

Allah the Exalted has warned the righteous believers against being tempted by these kinds of people. He has said,

﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ ٱللَّهَ غَـٰفِلًا عَمَّا يَعْمَلُ ٱلظَّـٰلِمُونَ إِنَّمَا يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ لِيَوْمٍ تَشْخَصُ فِيهِ ٱلْأَبْصَـٰرُ﴾

"Do not consider Allah to be unaware of what the wrongdoers perpetrate. He is merely deferring them to a Day on which their sight will be transfixed..." [Ibrāhīm 14:42]

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ drew our attention to this divine standard practice when he said, {If you see Allah giving a man that which he loves while he is firmly upon disobeying Him, know that that is ***istidrāj***.}[28]

28 Related by Aḥmad, at-Ṭabarānī and al-Bayhaqī in *ash-Shu'ab* with a good chain of transmission

He says in another ḥadīth, {When Allah wants good for His slave, He punishes him for his sins in this life.}[29]

He ﷺ also says, {If Allah wants good for someone, He causes him to have losses.}[30]

Therefore, why does knowing this fact does not make you thank Allah the Exalted and adorn yourself with patience with His tests, when you see that He is testing you while exempting someone else? Maybe you are someone whom Allah has favoured with His mercy, and thus He is giving you adversity in this life that will expiate all of your sins and He is drawing you towards the protection and shade of slavehood to Him.

However, I remind you once again that the veracity of this principle does not necessitate that you have the ability to apply it in relation to various individuals.

You are not capable of knowing what is within people and seeing the intricacies of their states with Allah ﷻ. The Revealed Law has a standard by which people's outward states are judged, but in inward matters that are only disclosed to the Knower of the Unseen. Allah nurtures His slaves according to what He knows of the intricacies of their states, not according to what you see of their conduct and behaviour.

29 Collected by Aḥmad and at-Ṭabarānī with an authentic chain of transmission from the narration of al-Ḥasan from 'Abdullah ibn Ma'qil, which is unbroken and directly attributed to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ

30 Related by al-Bukhārī

THE LOGIC OF SLAVEHOOD

Everything that we have mentioned falls under the logic of research and discussion based on the foundation of pure rational investigation.

If the researcher looks at his essence, becomes familiar with his true identity and realises that He is Allah's ﷻ owned slave and He can do whatever He wants with him, he will see that being doubtful or sceptical about His right is neither sensible nor feasible. The Owner, by definition, can do what He wants with His property, according to the wisdom that He sees and chooses. No one, whoever they may be, has a special right to intervene in His affair by objecting or suggesting or being sceptical, let alone the fact that the one making these interventions is the owned slave.

Thus, the justification for what Allah does to His slaves is that they are His slaves and that He actualises within them the meaning

of slavehood to Him and makes them submit to it, willingly or reluctantly. This justification, in and of itself, is sufficient wisdom to answer the question.[31]

When you consider this meaning, the word "justice" according to its common meaning has no place in this discussion as is, for something about the authority of this word necessitates that the Owner not be objected to for what He does with His actual property. Everything that He does with it is right and just in the absolute sense.

This is because injustice is when someone does something to someone else's property without their permission, so how can it be conceivable to attribute this quality to Allah when it is His actual property and no one besides Him has any say in the matter?

"Justice", according to its relative, common meaning is the opposite of "injustice", because each lies at the opposite end of one spectrum, which is to do something to someone else's property. This is absolutely inconceivable with regards to Allah the Exalted.

If justice is attributed to Allah the Exalted then it is one of the meanings of His favour towards His slaves. Allah ﷻ will establish a scale for His slaves on the Day of Standing that will reveal the evil deeds they committed or the acts of obedience they sent forth. He will reward everyone: if good then good and if bad then bad. This is what a ruler does to his subjects and what a judge does between his litigants. If what the ruler and judge do is based on a scale of ruling with justice, the Reckoning and the Scale on the Day of Standing will be established

31 (tn): i.e. the question posed right at the beginning of this book

in the same way. If He ﷻ wanted, He could shove all of His slaves into a bottomless pit in the Fire, or He could gather all of them in the blessings of His favour and His Paradise, without taking anything away from this scale of justice or being ascribed any meaning of injustice.

Therefore, the vast majority of Muslims have made consensus that Allah is not obligated to do anything.

Likewise, they have made consensus that the qualities of good and evil in things are relative. Nothing exists unless Allah the Exalted creates it and brings it into existence. In other words, He is the One who describes things as good and thus they are good in the Revealed Law, and He describes some things as evil and thus they are disliked or unlawful. If He wanted, He could strip these things of these qualities and nothing would be required or disliked.

Evil, which Allah ﷻ is transcendent above is that which He has decreed to be evil. The perfection that we affirm for Him ﷻ is that which He has decreed to be perfect. Therefore, everything the Lord does to His slaves is undoubtedly perfection, and is not sullied by injustice or evil.

Grasping this fact is the necessary foundation for understanding every meaning of man's slavehood to Allah, and Allah's divine power over all of His creation.

When you know that you are Allah's ﷻ owned slave that He created you from non-existence because He wanted to and that He will return you to non-existence when He wants to, what right do you have to interfere in that which Allah has not made you His partner? How can you ask, 'Why have You made this person rich and this person poor?' or

'Why have You harmed this person to the extent that You have disfigured him and made him miserable, and have benefitted this person to the extent that You have made happy and carefree?!....'

Yes, while you are subject to the authority of slavehood, you can ask about the wisdom! You learned about the wisdom in detail in the previous pages.

However, you have no right to transgress the bounds of your slavehood, which you cannot transgress no matter how much you try, in order to criticise or object.

If you are definitely going to object, then go ahead and object to Allah owning you and all the rest of His slaves. Are you prepared to do that?

If Allah the Exalted owning the world and everything it contains is an established fact, why would you interfere in that which does not concern you? The Owner does what He wants with His property.

A man met me in one of the masjids and asked me a question. 'I only had one child, no other. Allah took him from me and I loved him so much. Why did He do that to me? I am not aware that I disobeyed Him in something or that I fell short in something He has commanded me.'

I replied, 'Maybe you have not fallen short in one of your obligations to Allah, but you have no say in what you are asking about. The child is not your property in the way that you would think. Rather, both of you are Allah's ﷻ property. He willed to entrust him to you for a certain period of time and then He took him from you. He has

informed you that you are His slave, and that you have to realise this slavehood by being content with whatever He decrees for You. If you do not realise your slavehood to Him wilfully, it will be realised within you forcedly. The difference between the two states is that in the former you attain Allah's reward and favour, while in the latter you attain His punishment. In either case, you cannot free yourself from the authority of slavehood to Him.'

I then said to him, 'Today you are objecting and complaining. Can you carry on like this?

'Can you carry on as you are today, criticizing and objecting, until your share of this life has ended and you are withering away on your deathbed, and then the messenger entrusted with taking your spirit comes? Are you going to dispute with him why he has come and go with him to Allah with your criticisms and objections?

'You know that in those moments you will have surrendered with your entire being to Allah's decision and His judgment regarding you. At that time, you will be burdened with humility and weakness, and you will articulate submission to the Owner of the entire universe.

'Therefore, why do you not submit today, in happiness and contentment, to the One who will make you submit tomorrow in humiliation and by force?'

Why does the slave ignore the fact that he is a slave when he knows that ignoring it does not change anything about His slavehood to Him?

Nonetheless, Allah has decreed, out of His grace and favour, to grant you immense reward for acknowledging your slavehood to Him and submitting to His rulings. If you do not acknowledge this and do not carry out His commands and rulings, it will take nothing away from His ownership of you and will not grant you any freedom or emancipation.

Allah tests you with trials, and then He rewards you if you are patient.

He tests you with all kinds of blessings, and then He rewards you if you are grateful.

Adversities surround you, and then He pours bliss and ease into your heart if you have grasped this fact and believe in it.

Allah the Exalted says in His Masterful Book,

﴿وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُم بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ ٱلْخَوْفِ وَٱلْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ ٱلْأَمْوَٰلِ وَٱلْأَنفُسِ وَٱلثَّمَرَٰتِ وَبَشِّرِ ٱلصَّٰبِرِينَ ، ٱلَّذِينَ إِذَآ أَصَٰبَتْهُم مُّصِيبَةٌ قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ ، أُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَٰتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُو۟لَٰٓئِكَ هُمُ ٱلْمُهْتَدُونَ﴾

"We will definitely test you with a certain amount of fear and hunger and loss of wealth and life and fruits. But give good news to the steadfast. Those who, when disaster strikes them, say, 'We belong to Allah and to Him we will return.' Those are the people who will have blessings and mercy from their Lord; they are the ones who are guided." [al-Baqarah 2:155-157]

Allah thus decrees for His slaves according to the law of trial and tribulation, and that is one of His rights as their Owner.

He has prescribed for Himself that He will show them mercy and give them reward, and that is from His favour and grace towards them.

He has made the price for this reward one word,[32] which they say from their hearts and then use it for consolation and comfort: ﴿إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّآ إِلَيْهِ رَٰجِعُونَ﴾ **"We belong to Allah and to Him we will return."** [al-Baqarah 2:156]

Contemplate this exalted word and you will grasp the sublimity of the tranquillity and certainty that it fills you with.

You say from your heart, 'to Allah we belong', and this reminds you that you are Allah's slave, i.e. a commodity in the property of the All-Merciful. A commodity has no say regarding itself. Whether it is put in the highest station or buried deep in the earth, or even if you gave it a spirit and it was able to move and feel, it would still just be a commodity! Its affair is in the hands of its owner.

After that, you say, 'and to Him we will return', and you remember that after death you will come back to life and meet Allah ﷻ. Every adversity and agony that you bore with patiently, anticipating reward from Allah the Exalted, will be met with reward, blessings and felicity, which will never be interrupted and will never end. For you, this world and its events are nothing but a time of toil and ploughing, while the Hereafter is the time for reaping and harvesting.

32 Ar. *kalimah*, which can also refer to a phrase or clause

By repeating this word and being certain of its contents, Allah the Exalted will shower you with His mercy and pleasure.

Therefore, the logic of slavehood requires that you submit, without any objection or dispute. When you truly understand that you are a slave, you will find yourself in a state of surrender and submission.

THE LOGIC OF LOVE

However, if you awaken your heart to the remembrance of Allah the Exalted and the sublimity of His various attributes, and then you keep remembering it every time the world and its desires make it heedless, and you contemplate Allah the Exalted's various favours towards you – and all the world's adversities are nothing compared to His many, diverse blessings – and you continue like that, until you consider this worldly life and everything it contains as nothing more than a clean sheet of paper upon which Allah's attributes are engraved ﷻ:

The blessings that come to you via a human hand are nothing more than a manifestation of the attribute of the true Bestower of Blessings. The perfection that is apparent in the planning of any production, or the appearance of any creation, is nothing other than a reflection of His attribute of perfection. The beauty that moves your heart and makes your tears flow is nothing more than an effect from the One who brings all beauty into existence. The knowledge that you exalt in your heart is nothing but a gift from the Knower of the Unseen.

If you awaken your heart to these great realities, and you live with them and feel them for a certain period of time, you will come under the influence of unshakeable love for the Lord of the heavens and the earth, for your heart will be attached to these attributes, which are embodied in the various exigencies of love. Then you will take your heart to the one source of all these attributes, which is Allah ﷻ and you will gather all your desires into one desire. The object of love will become one after being distributed amongst various aspects and means.

You will then become intoxicated by this love, and you will have intimate conversations with the sole object of your love, speaking to Him from the depths of your heart:

My soul had scattered desires,

But I gathered them together when my eye saw You

The one whom I envied started to envy me

And I became the master of the mortals when You became my Master

I have left the people to have their world and their affairs

Because I am busy remembering You, You are my religion and my world

At that point, you will no longer feel the difference between the agony of the afflictions that you suffer and the pleasure of the blessings that you enjoy, as long as both are stamped with divine wisdom and His will ﷻ.

Indeed, it is the nature of the lover to submit happily to what his Beloved decrees for him, for by doing so he is able to express his love for Him and his attachment to Him.

The Prophets and the truly sincere[33] lived with these feelings. The people of Allah went through their worldly lives with these feelings, immersed in its afflictions and pains without even feeling them, let alone becoming annoyed and fed up with them, or objecting to what Allah had decreed for them.

No trial became severe for one of these lovers except that his heart increased in love and yearning for the One who sent down that trial.

When the pangs of death became severe for the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and he felt agony from every side, he was immersed in intimate conversation with his Lord, saying:

{O Allah, take me to the Highest Companionship ...O Allah, take me to the Highest Companionship...}

When death befell Mu'ādh ibn Jabal ﷺ the agony of death was severe. Every time he woke up from the throes of death, he would open his eyes and say, 'O Lord, hasten my death, for by Your might, you know that my heart loves You.'

'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn ﷺ was tested with a chronic illness that left him bedridden on a bed of stripped palm fibres for almost thirty years, until his flesh melted away and his bones grew feeble. His brother visited him once and wept, so he said to him, 'Why do you weep?' He replied, 'Because of the severe state that you are in.' He said, 'Do not weep. Whatever is most beloved to Allah is most beloved to me.'

33 Ar. *as-siddiqin*

If Allah the Exalted ennobled you with just a speck of His solicitude, or bequeathed to you just some of the blessing of this love, anxieties and base inclinations would be effaced from your soul and your heart would be immersed in unshakeable pleasure that can only be described by those whom Allah has honoured by allowing them to taste it. Indeed, all the delights of this world would not match the delight of this divine love once it has taken over your heart.

While being inundated with this love, the lover can be swept away into states that are outside of his will and control, such as announcing that he will do without the Paradise and its blessings, or that he does not care about the Fire and its punishment. This is because his heart has turned away from the pleasures of this life and the fears of the Hereafter and is instead attached to Allah's essence and has the overwhelming desire to meet Him. Thus, he only wants the blessing of being to near to his Master and the pleasure of gazing at His Noble Face.

Maybe this state of love will cause him to expose himself to Allah the Exalted's trials and tribulations, and while undergoing these hardships and suffering from them, he will declare the extent of his love for Allah the Exalted and how extremely pleased he is with everything that the Beloved sends his way.

However, perfect etiquette with Allah negates all of this. Rather, those who fall into this state have the excuse that they were overwhelmed. What they felt in their hearts took over their intellects.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ had the greatest love for Allah ﷻ and despite that, he never stopped asking Allah to exempt him and relieve him of all afflictions. When an affliction befell him, he was content

and patient with it, and he anticipated its reward from Allah ﷻ. In his supplications, He would ask Allah for Paradise and seek refuge in Him from the Fire.

It has been related that one of them composed some poetry because of the overflowing ecstasy that had taken over his heart:

Punish me with what You want, apart from being far from You

The most faithful lover is delighted with what pleases You

Allah the Exalted thus tested him with bladder stones, which caused him severe agony. He would go on to the street and give children money, saying, 'Supplicate to Allah on behalf of your uncle who lied!'

Nevertheless, this love, if it is bridled by the Revealed Law, is the peak of the high stations that the righteous and people of Allah ascend to, and it is the greatest cure for whatever trials and tribulations man may be exposed to in his worldly life.

As for when the heart is deprived of it, lower passions and desires infiltrate it along with the embellishments and amusements of this worldly life, because the heart cannot live in a vacuum. It has to be attached to something just as a mirror has to bear an image of something. If it is not beating with love for the Originator of the skies and the earth, it will inevitably beat with love for something else in existence that pleases it.

At that point, afflictions and trials, whatever they may be, become distressing for him, because they contradict the heart and its desires.

The greater the heart's attachment to these desires, the more distressing afflictions are for the soul, and the weaker one's ability is to bear with them and be patient.

It is for this reason that the scholars of theology[34] have made consensus that loving Allah and His Messenger is a foundational pillar of one's Islam and one's faith.

Maybe someone who claims that loving Allah the Exalted is nothing more than obeying Him will argue with you about this fact, someone who claims that the conventional love of the heart cannot be from the slave to his Lord; because the heart is attached to things perceptible to the senses while Allah is transcendent above that.

Know that there is no intelligent person who does not know that love leads to obedience, and is not obedience in and of itself. Acts of obedience need that which will push man to do them, and nothing will push him to do them apart from faith accompanied by love.

The intensity of one's love is and its prevalence in the heart will determine whether one's obedience increases or decreases. Were it not for this fact, the Companions would not have been different in their acts of obedience and their bearing with hardships, even though it is known that they are equal in the foundation of faith.

34 Ar. *at-tawhid*, i.e. Allah's Oneness and Uniqueness

It is not true that the heart is only attached to things perceptible to the senses, for most matters that the heart is drawn towards are abstract and not embodied in visible or perceptible form, such as knowledge, honour, courage, mercy and intelligence. In fact, the heart has strange and wondrous states in this domain, the essence and secrets of which are only known to their Originator, the Mighty, the Wise. Therefore, what created being claims that he is able to control his inclinations and the limits of his yearnings?

Despite all of this, the actual fact of the state attained by the righteous and the pious, whose hearts were filled with love for Allah ﷻ is the greatest and clearest evidence of the falsity of this claim and its stubborn denial of perceptible reality.

If loving Allah is nothing more than obeying Him, what is the meaning of Mu'ādh Ibn Jabal's ؓ statement while in the throes of death, 'By Your Might, You know that my heart loves You'? Is this anything other than a heart beating with these words?

What is the meaning of Allah's ﷻ statement when He describes the elite of His slaves: ﴿يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُۥٓ﴾ **"whom He loves and who love Him"** [al-Mā'idah 5:54]

What is quite astonishing is that the same people who deny that there is any figurative language in the Qur'ān and prohibit interpretation[35] in statements such as, ﴿ٱلرَّحْمَٰنُ عَلَى ٱلْعَرْشِ ٱسْتَوَىٰ﴾ **"the All-Merciful, established firmly upon the Throne"** [Ṭaha 20:5] and ﴿يَدُ ٱللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ﴾ **"Allah's hand is over their hands"** [al-Fatḥ 48:10] (even though this

35 Ar. *at-ta'wil*

requirement of theirs anthropomorphises Allah and renders Him similar to some of His creations) then rush to interpret "**who love Him**" to mean obedience and obeying commands when there is no need to expend effort in interpretation and figurative language.

You do not know what principle they are relying on that necessitates that they interpret in one situation and withhold from interpreting in another.

However, those that understand divine love are those whose hearts have tasted it!

As for the one for whom the Religion is just thoughts that remain locked-up in his mind, let his heart remain devoted to the various manifestations and desires of this worldly life and let him indulge freely therein. It is very likely that he knows nothing about the reality of divine love and its effect on the heart.

CONCLUSION

Everything we have mentioned can be summarised in two matters.

The first is that you become familiar with your essence and your reality before anything else, and you will know that you are Allah's owned slave ﷻ.

Man knowing His essence is the axis around which man's knowledge of everything he sees around him revolves. Without the existence of this axis and it being placed properly, all other types of knowledge remain blurry and veiled from the intellect behind many doubts and illusions.

By simply having knowledge of your essence, in a way that is accurate and sound, your various intellectual problems connected to the universe, man and life fall away. After that, the facts that we explained in detail in the previous pages become clear and obvious. At that point, this knowledge will grant you a good life, which will last for as long as you live.

It is the pledge that Allah the Exalted made to His slaves when He ﷻ said, ﴿مَنْ عَمِلَ صَـٰلِحًا مِّن ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهُۥ حَيَوٰةً طَيِّبَةً﴾ **"Anyone who acts rightly, male or female, being a believer, We will give them a good life..."** [an-Naḥl 16:97]

Look how comprehensive and accurate the expression 'a good life' is. It could be one of poverty or wealth. It could be one of pain and disease or one of health and well-being. Whatever it may be, it is a good life. Its goodness dissolves the pressure of all the trials and agonies that one experiences in life. This is the objective. This is the secret of happiness.

The second is that you know that this life, which you are living today, is nothing more than a short chapter from the story of the complete life that Allah ﷻ has made this astonishing, speaking creature the hero of.

Everything that your eyes see in this chapter has a conclusion or a supplement in the chapter that follows it.

Therefore, the events of this life cannot be put in their proper place unless one understands all the chapters of the story. Any judgment regarding them that is based on only this small part of it should be considered ignorance of reality and a type of self-delusion and self-deception.

If you want, you can say that the life you are living today is nothing but a small patch on a large picture showing an immense, comprehensive sight. It is absolutely out of the question that you would grasp

the value of this path or understand anything regarding its position or its contents unless you looked comprehensively and accurately at the entire picture.

Those who criticise the Creator's ﷻ wisdom, when they see misery and agonies around them are like someone who sees the first act of a play on stage and then hastens to judge it, based solely on that one act, as confusing and disorganised, or as lacking any sense of justice.

Alternatively, they are like someone who comes close and stares at a small part of a huge, magnificent painting produced by a great artist and judges it to be nothing more than wavy lines and disorganised, overlapping colours.

What is even more astonishing is when someone is convinced of Allah the Exalted's existence and that He is a wise deity who is ascribed all attributes of perfection and is transcendent above all imperfection but then does not believe in this fact. Instead, he persists in believing that this life is the beginning and the end, and that it will conclude with all its events fragmented and its conflicts unresolved. Thus, the oppressor will carry on oppressing without being punished for his oppression, while the oppressed will remain oppressed without retrieving any of his rights. Justice is stifled under Allah the Exalted's rule and His supervision in a sea of fierce randomness!

Indeed, it is most astonishing that someone can be convinced of Allah's ﷻ existence, and His sublime wisdom and then persist in believing this!

An intelligent child would not be able to compose a frivolous play like this, so would Allah, the Wise, the Informed, compose the story of His immense universe based on such astounding frivolity that even children are free of?

It is also most astonishing that someone would cling to this belief in the frivolity and randomness of life even after hearing Allah's warning against falling into this dangerous illusion:

﴿أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَـٰكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ ,

فَتَعَـٰلَى ٱللَّهُ ٱلْمَلِكُ ٱلْحَقُّ لَآ إِلَـٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ ٱلْعَرْشِ ٱلْكَرِيمِ﴾

"Did you suppose that We created you for amusement and that you would not be returned to Us? Exalted be Allah, the King, the Real. There is no god but Him. Lord of the Noble Throne." [al-Mu'minūn 23:115-116]

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْنَا ٱلسَّمَآءَ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَـٰعِبِينَ ,

لَوْ أَرَدْنَآ أَن نَّتَّخِذَ لَهْوًا لَّٱتَّخَذْنَـٰهُ مِن لَّدُنَّآ إِن كُنَّا فَـٰعِلِينَ﴾

"We did not create heaven and earth and everything in between them as a game. If We had desired to have some amusement, We would have derived it from Our Presence." [al-Anbiyā' 21:16-17]

﴿وَمَا خَلَقْنَا ٱلسَّمَآءَ وَٱلْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا بَـٰطِلًا ذَٰلِكَ ظَنُّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ فَوَيْلٌ لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ مِنَ ٱلنَّارِ ، أَمْ نَجْعَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا۟ وَعَمِلُوا۟ ٱلصَّـٰلِحَـٰتِ كَٱلْمُفْسِدِينَ فِى ٱلْأَرْضِ أَمْ نَجْعَلُ ٱلْمُتَّقِينَ كَٱلْفُجَّارِ﴾

"We did not create heaven and earth and everything between them to no purpose. That is the opinion of those who disbelieve. Woe to those who disbelieve, because of the Fire! Would we make those who believe and do right actions the same as those who cause corruption on the earth? Would We make those who are godfearing the same as the dissolute?" [Ṣād 38:27-28]

Dear reader,

Be convinced that humanity will traverse the bridge of this worldly life, which you are living in. Humanity will stand before the Lord of all Creation, and that is when the loose ends of this story will be tied up.

There is no Muslim afflicted with disaster and is patient whom you feel sympathy and compassion for in this world except that you will wish you could be in his place in the Hereafter, and there is no happy person, spoiled by comfort, who spends extravagantly upon himself in this world except that you will feel sorry for him in the Hereafter because of his misery and distress.

It is then that the abstruse events you witness and experience today will be explained to you.

You will hear the voice of truth pulsating through all of time and space: ﴿ٱلْيَوْمَ تُجْزَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍۭ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ لَا ظُلْمَ ٱلْيَوْمَ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ سَرِيعُ ٱلْحِسَابِ﴾ **"Every soul will be repaid today for what it earned. Today there will be no injustice. Allah is Swift at Reckoning."** [Ghāfir 40:17]

Better than everything I have presented to you throughout this book would be to give you some brilliant, comprehensive words stated by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. These words provide an outstanding, brief illustration of this life's story in full, and I want to place a small sample in front of you so that you can see man's timeline from beginning to end.

Please listen attentively and without inhibition:

{It is often the case that a soul that is enjoying itself and living a carefree life will be hungry and naked on the Day of Standing. It is often the case that a hungry, naked soul will be carefree and enjoying itself on the Day of Standing.

It is often the case that someone who honours his ego is humiliated by it. It is often the case that someone who humiliates his ego is honoured by it. It is often the case that someone who partakes in and enjoys the blessings of wealth and luxury that Allah has bestowed upon him will have no rank or standing in the sight of Allah.

The actions of the Paradise are like climbing a rugged hill, while the actions of the Fire are like walking on smooth, even land. It is often the case that the passions of one moment cause longstanding grief.}[36]

36 Related by al-Bayhaqī, ad-Daylami in *Musnad al-Firdaws* and Ibn Sa'd in *at-Tabaqāt*

Finally, if you are still not convinced by anything from the totality of what has been stated, know that you are in doubt about Allah the Exalted's existence. It would be better for you to go back and re-examine carefully what you think about Allah ﷻ instead of wasting time and exhausting yourself in that which is of no benefit.